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Official Records

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Tuesday, 21 September 1999, 3.00 p.m.
New York

President: Mr. Gurirab ..... (Namibia)

The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

Earthquake in China

The President: I wish to convey to members of the Assembly that I have learned with shock and sadness of the earthquake that struck near Taipei yesterday. May I, on behalf of the members of the Assembly and on my own behalf extend to the people of the Taiwan Province of China our heartfelt sympathy at this time of trial.

Address by Mr. Hugo Chávez Frías, President of the Republic of Venezuela

The President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of the Republic of Venezuela.

Mr. Chávez Frías, President of the Republic of Venezuela, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations the President of the Republic of Venezuela, His Excellency Mr. Hugo Chávez Frías, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Chávez Frías (*spoke in Spanish*): First, I wish to express my very great pleasure at speaking for the first time in this world forum as head of State and at greeting its members on behalf of the people of Venezuela and my Government, and particularly at speaking at this session of the General Assembly, the last of this century and millennium, which, for us, adds special meaning to the event.

My presence here also affords me an opportunity to express some ideas on the times and circumstances in which we are now living, all of us worldwide but also, and a little more specifically, about times and circumstances in my own country. These are times and circumstances, Mr. President and members, which of course we share with you.

A few years ago, when the Berlin Wall fell, I think someone said that peace had broken out. I truly believe that that expression covers a series of phenomena which began to surface at that time and subsequently evolved and developed to become part of the global scenario. In my view, this rapid emergence of phenomena, simultaneously all round the world, each of them with so many distinguishing characteristics, has made it more difficult to understand, appreciate and realistically perceive what is actually happening in the world today.

Many analysts of that time spoke of quantum leaps. I believe that a quantum leap is indeed under way; there is an ongoing process of universal change, mutation even. I also believe that we must sharpen our ability to analyse and observe this phenomenon — open conflicts, resurgent nationalisms, racial and religious conflicts — which are occurring in a world that is undergoing processes of fusion while at the same time undergoing dangerous and alarming processes of fission. We are entering the new

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century with these signs around us which at one and the same time are cause for concern and reason for optimism at the changes unfolding. Actually, there are many praiseworthy things about the century that is closing, but there are also many things worthy of condemnation and from which we should learn our lesson so that they do not recur.

Within that process of universal change, there is a country small in size, a nearby country — Venezuela — that faces its own changes; a country that is undertaking its own irrevocable and necessary changes; a country that is being reborn from its own ashes; a country that is once again raising the flag of true, authentic democracy. I shall speak a few words here about that country, my country, our country, your country: Venezuela. Venezuela, blessed by the hand of God; Venezuela, in the very north with an outstanding geographic location; Venezuela, full of incalculable natural wealth; Venezuela, which has one of the world's largest oil reserves and mineral resources of all kinds, such as gold, diamonds, bauxite and iron ore; Venezuela, which has water; Venezuela, which has fertile soil; Venezuela, which has scarcely 20 million inhabitants for almost 1 million square kilometres. But 80 per cent of the inhabitants of this wealth-filled country are poor.

For many years it was said of Venezuela that it was a model of democracy in the world and in Latin America. However, today it is undergoing a process of profound change, a crisis unprecedented in our history — a moral crisis, an economic crisis, a political crisis, a social crisis — which has brought it to dangerous extremes, with explosive forces that have been building for decades.

Even so, in Venezuela we have found a peaceful way out of the morass, the tragedy. We have discovered a way that is fully democratic. We have encouraged changes in Venezuela towards respect for human rights, as is right and proper, because, however tragic the situation, however urgent the need for change, never, in our view, should human rights, respect for freedom of expression, respect for the intrinsic values of the individual, respect for freedom of the press and respect for freedom of thought be set aside. The Venezuelan people has arisen from its own ashes.

I should also like to add — and you, Mr. President, and members undoubtedly know this — that the Venezuelan people is a people with a great historical legacy: it is the birthplace of Simón Bolívar, the Liberator, one of the greats of the millennium. Venezuela carries in its essence the seed of democracy, of fraternity and solidarity. We must therefore acknowledge the ability of Venezuelan people, which we represent here in this Assembly, to find peaceful and democratic solutions to a profound crisis which in other places and other eras, would have given rise to the violent and regrettable acts that have submerged many peoples in fratricidal conflict for years and even decades at a time.

We know that the world has had a great deal of news about Venezuela in recent months, some of it a little disturbing as a result of the confusion and speed of the changes. I thank representatives for allowing me a few minutes to take the opportunity to assure the entire world that in Venezuela there was respect, is respect and will continue to be respect for a democratic process which emanates from the will of the people. For example, last December there were elections in Venezuela, which produced a positive result for democracy. We won the elections with almost 60 per cent of the popular vote.

Subsequently, on 2 February this year, the very day that we arrived at the Government Palace, we did something which had never before happened in my country: we called for a national referendum. In that referendum, held on 25 April, the country voted for the electoral path leading to a constituent assembly. Ninety-two per cent said "Yes", and on 25 July there were open elections, in which all political and social sectors participated, with absolute freedom of expression, freedom of criticism and freedom of the press, the likes of which had never occurred in my country.

The National Constituent Assembly that resulted from that electoral process consists of 131 Venezuelan men and women, representing the broadest segments of society, including indigenous peoples, because for the first time in Venezuela's history a group of aborigines represent the indigenous peoples of Venezuela in the great Assembly. The Assembly members have been working together for a month and a half on a new national constitution in a mechanism of cooperation. The entire country is promoting progress towards this new Constitution; for the sake of the democracy we are defending and advocating, it will be approved only by the country. It will not enter into force until it is approved by the Venezuelans in a new referendum, which we hope will be held in November, or at the latest in December.

In other words, when the new century dawns next year Venezuela will have a new political project, a fundamental new charter as the foundation of the new

Republic and of truly legitimate executive power governing by democracy — as Abraham Lincoln said, for the people and by the people. We will have a genuine judicial power, which we had lost in the past few years owing to corruption. This judicial power will administer justice. We rely on true legislative power to respond to the calls and needs of the Venezuelan people.

We also propose the establishment of a fourth power — moral power — to combat corruption, the mother of all Venezuelan crises of recent years, and to fight for education, especially for children. We further propose an electoral power to achieve a balance of power. There will be a division of powers, particularly legitimate powers, with the profound popular content of true democracy.

We are also promoting a new economic model for Venezuela. For 20 years we experienced a terrible crisis that produced the breakdown of a country, the breakdown of a model. We are now promoting a humanistic, productive, competitive and diversified economic model, based on the great potential of our country and incorporating the world currents of a new international economic order, with greater justice and a human face, which will facilitate satisfying the needs of the human being. This must be one of the fundamental goals of any economic process.

In just over six months we have been able to come here to tell the world of our successes — small successes, but they presage what is going to happen in Venezuela. We have undertaken an economic revitalization, respecting all economic freedoms. In a healthy coexistence between the State and the market, we have been gaining ground in the macroeconomic area. We have started to bring down inflation; maintained our international reserves; helped raise the price of a barrel of oil, in cooperation with the other oil-producing countries; and brought about an exchange balance. We have also been revitalizing some production sectors, and we are calling on global investors to invest in various petrochemical, gas, touristic, industrial and agricultural projects and enterprises. We are thus building a new economic model.

We are also building a new society based on public morality in respect of human rights. I shall give an example, small, but one which says a lot about what is happening in Venezuela in terms of the social order. Barely three days ago the 1999-2000 school year began. This year the school matriculation — that is, the number of students in public schools — increased by 25 per cent. As a result of a model of privatization of education, and of the poverty that has been invading the social strata, many children and young people did not go to school; they could not pay the fees, nor could they pay for school supplies. This year we have opened up the schools and we have been repairing them. Now we are very happy to tell the world that in just six months the number of children and young people starting a new school year has increased by 25 per cent. Furthermore, attention to education has gone beyond being one of the principal national priorities; it is now a matter of States.

The same can be said of health. We have activated a special plan which we call "Project Bolivar 2000". For six months we have been dealing with Venezuelans' greatest needs, such as health, road repairs and opening ways of penetration and activation of some sectors of microenterprises. We have set up a people's bank to provide microcredit especially to bring about the recovery of the economy, the microeconomy. We have created a unique social fund to promote solutions basically for health and education.

As can be seen, we are promoting a genuine process of transition: politically, socially, economically and, above all, ethically. A new Venezuela is being born, born to present itself to the world free and sovereign, ready to take up firmly the flags of a new world, a fairer world. We are in solidarity with the struggles of the world. The world of the century to come must be much better than the world of the twentieth century which is ending. We call out for justice for the peoples of the third world, for equality and human development. We appeal for the integration of peoples and for peace. Only a country revitalized from within can be incorporated by its own strength into the international relations of a modern world, such as the world which is dawning.

In this part of South America, Venezuela is being reborn and offering the world its heart, its arms of integration. I give a special salute to all the peoples of the Latin American continent and the Caribbean, Central America, North America, Asia, Africa, Europe and Oceania. We must continue together, with a new sense of brotherhood, to struggle for a better world.

In this my first statement to the General Assembly, in the last session of the century, when we are preparing for the Millennium Assembly, I should like to congratulate you, Mr. President, the Secretary-General and all the world representatives gathered here at the United Nations, because we are aware of the great effort being made to reform and perfect the machinery to

achieve peace, brotherhood and solidarity in a world that is, as I said at the beginning, undergoing profound change.

These words come from my heart and go out to the entire world in the name of a people who are themselves being reborn — the Venezuelan people — with our best wishes that each day we may find greater strength and come closer to attaining — as I said before — the path to peace, brotherhood, development, justice and self-determination. Let us not say as someone else has said that peace has broken out. Rather, let us say that in the next few years we may all be able to proclaim loudly that peace, democracy and development have triumphed.

I send a warm embrace to you all on behalf of the people of Simon Bolivar, the people of Venezuela.

The President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of the Republic of Venezuela for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Hugo Chávez Frías, President of the Republic of Venezuela, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Address by Mr. Carlos Saúl Menem, President of the Argentine Republic

The President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of the Argentine Republic.

Mr. Carlos Saúl Menem, President of the Argentine Republic, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations the President of the Argentine Republic, His Excellency Mr. Carlos Saúl Menem, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Menem *(interpretation from Spanish):* We are pleased that an important figure in Namibia's attainment of independence has the responsibility of conducting this session of the General Assembly.

I also wish to express my appreciation to the Foreign Minister of Uruguay, Mr. Didier Opertti, for his skill in presiding over the previous session of the General Assembly.

After 10 years as President of Argentina, and with my constitutional mandate about to end, I should like to share with the Assembly the transformations that Argentina has experienced during this time, in a world which has also been transformed.

In the past 10 years we have experienced a change of Copernican dimensions. It started with the recovery of democracy. Since that time we have built a stable political system based on the popular will and respect for the rule of law. We have made respect for human rights a sacred value. We are at peace with all our neighbours, with which we have now undertaken a robust integration process. We have put an end to proliferation policies and have actively committed ourselves to peacekeeping operations. We have developed an open and free economy, worked to combat poverty and inequality of opportunity and fought discrimination in all its forms. In short, we have recovered and embraced the high values of our culture, which are the essence of the Charter of the United Nations and which we hope to bring with us into the twenty-first century.

At the regional level, which is our natural sphere of interest, we have solved all outstanding border and demarcation issues with the Republic of Chile and thus opened the way for fruitful integration. We have established consultation and coordination mechanisms with Brazil and Chile on security and defence issues. We are convinced that security depends much more on friendship and cooperation with our neighbours than on what we spend on weapons. As one of the guarantors of the Rio de Janeiro Protocol, we contributed to the peace agreement between Peru and Ecuador. We are working tirelessly for the consolidation of democracy and development in our region.

In the field of disarmament and the non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, we have taken the following steps. On 28 November 1990 we signed the Foz do Iguaçú Joint Declaration, which consolidated the policy of nuclear transparency with Brazil, and since then we have developed a common peaceful and non-proliferation nuclear policy. Argentina acceded to the Treaty of Tlatelolco, in 1994; the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, in 1995; and the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty, in 1998. We are also members of the Nuclear Suppliers Group, and in 1993 Argentina joined the Missile Technology Control Regime.

In the field of space activities, the National Commission for Space Activities has worked with the United States National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) on the SAC-B satellite mission, the placement in orbit and operation of the SAC-A satellite technology mission and the forthcoming launch of the SAC-C satellite mission, Argentina's first Earth observation satellite. We have also started some ambitious projects in this field with Brazil, as well as with Canada, France, Germany and the United Kingdom.

We have ratified the Chemical Weapons Convention, and we are working on a monitoring mechanism for the Biological Weapons Convention. In this context, Argentina joined the Australian Group on 11 December 1992.

Argentina's self-restraint in the development of nuclear weapons is recognized as an example by the international community.

On 14 September this year Argentina ratified the Ottawa Convention on the prohibition of anti-personnel landmines.

At the Southern Cone Common Market (MERCOSUR) summit in Ushuaia, Argentina, on 24 July 1998, MERCOSUR, Bolivia and Chile were declared a zone of peace and a zone free of weapons of mass destruction. A commitment was also made to declare the area a zone free of anti-personnel landmines.

We believe that all States must renounce nuclear weapons and give unequivocal guarantees that their nuclear capability and most advanced technology are exclusively for peaceful purposes.

Allow me once more to refer to the pending sovereignty dispute concerning the Malvinas Islands. One of the first measures we adopted upon taking office was to re-establish diplomatic relations with the United Kingdom, in February 1990. A new stage was thereby begun in which the ties between the two countries were taken to their highest level in history. This was reaffirmed by my recent visit, as President, to the United Kingdom and that of His Royal Highness Prince Charles to Argentina. Since then, while reaffirming our sovereignty rights and motivated by a spirit of reconciliation, we have worked harmoniously with the United Kingdom on various matters relating to the South Atlantic, such as the rebuilding of a climate of mutual trust in the area, the preservation of live marine resources, the exploration and exploitation of hydrocarbons, the resumption of flights between the continent and the Malvinas Islands, and the access of persons carrying Argentine identity documents to the Malvinas Islands.

Argentina is a country that is proud of its cultural diversity. Our Constitution establishes as a national goal the recovery of the Malvinas Islands while guaranteeing the strictest respect for the way of life of their inhabitants. I am convinced that the conditions exist for Argentina and the United Kingdom to begin without further delay a dialogue towards a definitive solution of the sovereignty dispute, thus fulfilling the numerous resolutions adopted by the General Assembly and the Special Political and Decolonization Committee.

Argentina is the sixth-largest troop contributor to the Organization. At this time, we are involved in 10 of the 17 current operations, including those in Kosovo and East Timor. We have also incorporated personnel from other Latin American countries into our troops.

In Argentina, the defence and promotion of human rights is a State policy. That is why we have actively participated in the establishment of the International Criminal Court, as a way to put an end to the culture of impunity.

The numerous humanitarian missions in which "White Helmets" have been deployed in South America, Central America, the Middle East, Africa and the Caucasus are a reflection of the success of this initiative, which I put forward in 1993. Argentina agrees with the Secretary-General that the "White Helmets" can provide assistance, in close partnership with the Blue Helmets, in conflict situations.

Argentina supports a world economy of open markets. However, we see the re-emergence of hidden forms of protectionism. This is why we call on all States, in particular to the most developed ones, to take part in the "millennium round", with the goal of attaining an open, multilateral system that excludes no sector of economic activity.

As evidence of our concern regarding environmental issues, in November 1998 Argentina hosted the fourth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, which adopted the Buenos Aires Plan of Action. During the fifth ministerial meeting of the Zone of Peace and Cooperation of the South Atlantic, which was held in Buenos Aires in October 1998, a Plan of Action was

adopted for the first time in order to carry out the objectives of the Zone, which include the protection of the environment and of living resources.

The international community must urgently prepare contingency plans to face the year 2000 problem in such a way that essential community services are not affected.

Since 1 January 1999, Argentina has been an elected member of the Security Council. I would like briefly to share some thoughts with the Assembly.

The responsibility of the Security Council in the maintenance of peace cannot be irreplaceable, and its authority must be strengthened.

The Council must work in cooperation with other bodies of the United Nations system and with regional organizations in order to carry out its tasks effectively.

We have a responsibility towards the men and women who make up the Blue Helmets, as well as towards those who perform humanitarian work in conflict situations. It is our obligation to protect them. We call upon countries to ratify the Convention on the Safety of United Nations and Associated Personnel.

Concerning the reform of the Security Council, Argentina supports the creation of a system of non-discriminatory, open rotation. It would be unfair and unrealistic, at the beginning of a new millennium, to multiply the privileges and discriminatory practices that came about only as a result of war in 1945. Therefore, no new categories of membership should be introduced in regions where those categories do not exist, especially if tradition and history do not warrant it.

Finally, I am convinced that the United Nations is called upon to play an even more relevant role in the twenty-first century. Argentina, which is now to be among the 15 main countries of the Organization, will participate with the same conviction as always in the realization of the noble objectives of the Charter.

Once again, I thank you, Sir, and all the Members of the United Nations. After 10 years and six months, I bid you farewell for the last time.

The President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of the Argentine Republic for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Carlos Saúl Menem, President of the Argentine Republic, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Agenda item 9 (*continued*)

General debate

Address by Mr. Mikuláš Dzurinda, Prime Minister of the Slovak Republic

The President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the Prime Minister of the Slovak Republic.

Mr. Mikuláš Dzurinda, Prime Minister of the Slovak Republic, was escorted to the rostrum.

The President: I have great pleasure in welcoming the Prime Minister of the Slovak Republic, His Excellency Mr. Mikuláš Dzurinda, and inviting him to address the General Assembly.

Mr. Dzurinda (Slovakia): I would like to express my sincere congratulations, Sir, on your election as President of the General Assembly at its fifty-fourth session and to extend my best wishes for a successful conduct of the deliberations and work of this body.

I wish also to thank your predecessor, Mr. Didier Opertti, for his leadership and his personal contribution to the achievements of the fifty-third session.

The United Nations was created over 50 years ago in specific political circumstances marked by enthusiasm brought about by the end of the Second World War. Its establishment was a very important step towards a new global order, although the political situation dominated by super-Power rivalry over next several decades prevented it from using its potential to the full. The current international political situation is much more propitious for pursuing the original purposes and principles of the United Nations Charter. Following the end of the bipolar division of the world, we have witnessed new political processes that have profoundly changed the political landscape. An ever- growing number of countries are embracing democratic principles and implementing them in practice. This should be emphasized, especially in a forum such as the General Assembly, because the spread of democracy gives momentum to the work of the United Nations and stimulates the expansion of its activities throughout the world.

A growing number of countries are acknowledging their share of the global responsibility for a better life on our planet and for the wise exploitation of its resources. In this era of globalization and interdependence, the United Nations plays a unique and irreplaceable role. Its fundamental and key tasks — safeguarding peace and security; promoting economic cooperation and social development, including poverty eradication; strengthening the role of international law; and protecting human rights — are even more relevant today than they were 54 years ago. The Slovak Republic is very much aware of this fact.

One of the crucial issues in reforming the Organization and preparing it for the challenges that lie ahead is the reform of the Security Council. The Security Council is the symbol and pillar of the concept of collective security, designed in the aftermath of the most tragic conflict of this century in order to prevent its repetition.

The fundamental political changes that have taken place in the world in the last 50 years represent a challenge to the future role of the Security Council and its legitimacy. We must draw lessons from past setbacks. Caused mostly by the divergent interests of major actors or by a lack of political will, they paralysed the Security Council, which remained inactive instead of taking effective action on behalf of the Member States. Otherwise, we risk the erosion of the authority of the Security Council and consequently of its central role in the maintenance of international peace and security. The United Nations cannot afford to let that happen, because there is no alternative to the concept of collective security as embodied in the United Nations Charter. The modern world needs a supreme security authority with unquestioned credibility.

The key tasks of Security Council reform are to strengthen its representative character, improve the effectiveness and transparency of its decision-making process and working methods and, ultimately, enhance its legitimacy. To achieve this goal, it is necessary to reach the widest possible agreement on enlarging its membership and on the veto right, which plays a pivotal role in the overall reform of the Council. Unless the scope of application of the veto and its relationship to potential new members of the Security Council are clarified, it will be very difficult to proceed to the enlargement of the category of permanent members.

Slovakia recognizes as legitimate the efforts of some countries, which, being capable of assuming a share of the gobal responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security, desire a position in an enlarged Security Council. At the same time, however, it is necessary to ensure the appropriate representation of the developing countries of Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean region, since those countries represent a significant majority of the United Nations membership.

Regrettably, as the past six years of discussions in the Open-ended Working Group on the Question of Equitable Representation on and Increase in the Membership of the Security Council have shown, a fundamental divergence of views continues to exist with regard to enlarging the category of permanent members, thus making it very unlikely that concrete results will be achieved in the near future.

We believe that in order to move ahead, we should proceed gradually rather than running in place in order to prevent the United Nations from "missing the boat" in our rapidly changing world. If there is no agreement on other categories of membership, Slovakia is ready, at this stage, to support expanding only the non-permanent category. The overall number of seats in the enlarged Security Council would then depend on the scenario eventually agreed on by Member States. Nevertheless, it should not exceed the range of 23 to 25 in order to preserve its capability to act promptly. I would like to point out that Slovakia is flexible in this regard. The expansion of the Security Council should also take into account an appropriate increase in the representation of the Eastern European regional Group, whose membership has more than doubled in recent years.

Peacekeeping operations continue to be one of the key instruments available to the United Nations in the discharge of its primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security. Nevertheless, in the light of the tragic experience of recent and still-raging conflicts, it is necessary to reinforce those mechanisms, which would allow the United Nations to more actively concentrate on preventing conflicts and addressing their causes rather than their consequences. An early- warning system should be further enhanced, and preventive diplomacy should play a more active role in potential conflict situations.

Today's conflicts have many dimensions, which must be addressed comprehensively. An integrated, multidimensional approach to peacekeeping and post-conflict peace-building must be taken if a conflict is to be resolved in a durable manner. It is important to ensure an

effective coordination among the military, civilian and humanitarian components of multidisciplinary operations, which should be given adequate mandates and resources.

As time is a crucial factor in most cases of deployment of peacekeeping forces, Slovakia supports the efforts to enhance United Nations rapid-deployment capabilities through the United Nations standby arrangements system. Regional initiatives play an important role in this respect, and Slovakia has therefore joined the Central European Nations Cooperation in Peace Support, aimed at closer cooperation among several Central European States in the field of the preparation, training and participation of their armed forces in peacekeeping operations.

Since its admission to the United Nations Slovakia has been contributing to a number of United Nations peacekeeping operations in Africa, Asia and Europe, including those in Angola, Rwanda, the border region of Uganda and Rwanda, Liberia, Sierra Leone, the Syrian Golan Heights, Jerusalem, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia and Eastern Slavonia. The Slovak Government has also recently decided to contribute an engineering unit to the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO). Slovakia thus ranks among the leading troop contributors in terms of the number of troops per capita. I would like to take this opportunity to assure the Assembly that Slovakia is determined to continue to support United Nations peacekeeping activities in all the main areas: troops, logistics and training.

The active participation of the Slovak Republic in United Nations peacekeeping activities has proved that it has a responsible approach to the maintenance of international peace and security, and has logically led to the submission of its candidature for the non-permanent seat in the Security Council for the term 2000-2001. Through membership in the Security Council, Slovakia would like to prove that small countries, too, can make an important contribution to the resolution of conflicts and crises in the world.

Kosovo is the most recent example of the tragic reality of the present-day Balkans, driven by violence and ethnic hatred, which is not only a product of the region's complicated historical circumstances, but, above all, the result of human rights violations and of the misuse of ethnic differences to reach short-sighted political goals. Slovakia attaches great importance to the political resolution of the Kosovo conflict, and appreciates the efforts of the United Nations, the Secretary-General, the Contact Group dealing with the former Yugoslavia and regional organizations to this end. We welcomed with great hope the adoption of Security Council resolution 1244 (1999), aimed at creating conditions for building a democratic Kosovo based on respect for the human rights of all citizens, regardless of their ethnic origin and religion, and for all the principles enshrined in Article 2 of the United Nations Charter.

Post-conflict peace-building in Bosnia and Herzegovina has proved that reconstruction of a conflict-torn society on a multi-ethnic basis is in no way an easy task. However, if new tragedies are to be prevented, the international community must give a hand to the people in that part of Europe in their quest for reconciliation and for building mutual trust. An important role in these efforts is to be played by the economic reconstruction and development of the entire Balkan region.

In this connection, Slovakia welcomes and fully supports the Stability Pact for South-Eastern Europe. I believe it will open a new stage in the history of the region. The proof of the importance which the Slovak Republic attaches to securing stability in this part of Europe is the appointment of the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Slovakia, Mr. Eduard Kukan, as the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Balkans. A conference was held under his auspices in Bratislava, the capital of Slovakia, on the post-war reconstruction of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. The conference clearly showed the direction which the international community and Yugoslav society should take if the country is to become a firm part of the community of nations in the Balkans, built on new foundations.

The Slovak Republic considers a just peace in the Middle East to be an important component of global stability. For this reason, we welcomed the signing, on 4 September 1999, of a new agreement between Israel and the Palestinian Authority on the implementation of individual steps of the Wye Memorandum. At the same time, we hope that Israel, Syria and Lebanon will also renew their dialogues. Although certain issues remain to be resolved among the parties, we believe that a final agreement will eventually be reached and a permanent peace will be secured for the Middle East region.

The continent of Africa is suffering from far too many conflicts, often fed by poverty and underdevelopment. Clearly, cooperation between the international community and African States is greatly

needed in order to prevent and to address conflicts and to help Africa to create conditions for sustainable development. Slovakia shares the Secretary-General's view, expressed in his report on Africa last year, that Africans themselves must demonstrate the political will to respond to problems by peaceful means and to adhere to the rules of good governance through ensuring respect for human rights and the rule of law, strengthening democratization and promoting transparency in public administration. In the meantime, the assistance of the international community is important not only for the economic development of African States, but also to enable them to build their own capacity for conflict prevention and resolution.

The African regional and subregional organizations, such as the Organization of African Unity, the Economic Community of West African States and the Southern African Development Community, should be given credit for the role they have played in the implementation of peace operations in several African countries, and should be provided with the necessary financial and material assistance. Slovakia is ready to contribute its share — for instance, by offering its Training Centre for Peacekeeping Operations, which has specific facilities for training engineering units.

Another pressing problem is the prevention of the illicit flow of arms and military material into zones of conflict, and the enforcement of an effective implementation of the Security Council arms embargoes. The most disturbing fact is that the Security Council's sanctions are violated mostly by non-African countries which have turned Africa into a store for all kinds of weapons. Slovakia firmly adheres to all Security Council decisions, including sanctions. We believe that Security Council sanctions committees should be actively engaged in ensuring the concerted efforts of all the actors concerned — Governments, international governmental and non-governmental organizations, private companies and leaders of opinion — in order to identify the sources of arms flows into zones of conflict and cut off military forces and rebel groups from their resources, thus eliminating their ability to wage war.

I realize that the United Nations is not only a peacekeeper; it also has a role to play in the everyday lives of many people suffering from hunger, poverty, disease, illiteracy and backwardness. All of us are obligated to promote sustainable development and to protect the global environment and human rights. The best way to prevent and eliminate conflicts is to create conditions for a worthy life for every individual on this planet as well as friendly relations among nations based on the principles of equal rights, democracy, the rule of law and respect for human rights.

Being a small country, the Slovak Republic does not always have means to resolve global issues comparable to those that some big countries have. But it compensates for this disadvantage with its determined and active approach to all the major problems that mankind is facing. As experience has shown, small and medium-sized countries can contribute significantly to the resolution of crises and conflicts. This may be due to the fact that these countries are not burdened with power interests and are capable of presenting and advocating solutions acceptable to all. Slovakia has already demonstrated its ability to be an active player in international relations. The United Nations and its Security Council are the forums in which we can put this valuable experience to the best use.

The President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the Prime Minister of the Slovak Republic for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Mikuláš Dzurinda, Prime Minister of the Slovak Republic, was escorted from the rostrum.

The President: I now call on His Excellency Mr. Modibo Sidibe, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Mali.

Mr. Sidibe (Mali) (*spoke in French*): I wish first to congratulate you warmly, Sir, on your election to the presidency of the General Assembly at its fifty-fourth session. This does honour to your country, Namibia, and is a source of joy and satisfaction to all of Africa, and particularly to my country, Mali. You may count on the full support of my delegation, on behalf of which it is my honour to address the General Assembly today. I am convinced that with your talent and your experience as an estimable diplomat you will guide the work of the Assembly to a successful conclusion.

I wish also to take this opportunity to convey to your predecessor, His Excellency Mr. Didier Opertti, our satisfaction at the commitment and skill with which he guided the work of the Assembly at its fifty-third session.

Let me also reaffirm the gratitude of the Government of Mali to the Secretary-General, His Excellency Mr. Kofi Annan, for the determination and wisdom he has shown in the quest for solutions to the central concerns of the international community.

The fifty-fourth session of the General Assembly is taking place at the dawn of the third millennium, at a time when the gap between the developed and the developing worlds is growing ever larger. Imbalances in the world economy, the unequal distribution of wealth, poverty, grave and massive violations of human rights, massacres and conflicts of every kind pose a serious threat to international stability.

Despite significant progress in many areas, the United Nations continues to face daunting challenges. It must formulate a collective approach with shared responsibility and greater, more effective solidarity to bring about the economic cooperation that is indispensable for lasting peace and security for all. In that context, many and varied challenges face Mali, Africa, the world at large, and the United Nations at the end of the twentieth century, such as debt, development financing, security including disarmament and international terrorism, democracy, human rights, international migration and United Nations reform.

Last year we spoke out from this rostrum against a globalization dominated by market forces and a financial approach, and in favour of a globalization based on sustainable human development. That is the real challenge, and our growing conviction is that we can resolve all present imbalances if, through renewed, responsible and candid political dialogue, we tackle them with a global and unified vision, with commitment to genuine partnership, and with a sense of shared, equal responsibility in the building of a better world, a world for mankind. That is the approach we must take to addressing the problems of developing countries: indebtedness, their integration as real actors in the world economy, and development financing.

The problem of developing-country indebtedness must continue to be a focus of the attention of the international community with a view to finding a lasting solution that will be acceptable to all. To be sure, the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Debt (HIPC) Initiative and the initiative adopted at the Cologne summit of the Group of Seven in June 1999 were important steps. But, because it absorbs more than a third of the export income of developing countries and because debt-servicing costs imperil the future of generations to come, debt is an insurmountable obstacle to any development effort. The debt burden must not merely be lightened; debts must be cancelled. Without playing down any responsibility here, debt cancellation has become necessary in order to enable the efforts and sacrifices made by developing countries to yield their full benefits for their peoples. Debt cancellation, along with a new, more rational debt policy based on the productive capacities of these countries, would lay the foundations for true, sustainable development financing.

Long seen as an act of generosity by the rich towards the poor, development assistance is now viewed as a tangible expression of a solidarity that is indispensable. It has significantly declined in recent years, and we must do everything possible to reverse that trend in order to better meet the financing needs of developing countries. My country, Mali — which has already enacted significant political, economic and structural reforms — hopes that special attention will be given to the situation of African countries in any consideration of this matter. I appeal to developed countries completely to fulfil their commitment to increase official development assistance, to build up our economic capacities in the areas of processing and marketing our commodities, and to pay proper prices for our products and facilitate market access.

The current state of affairs demands a new partnership based on an acknowledgement that development financing is a shared responsibility, which should be reflected in more equitable burden-sharing among donors. Here, the high-level meeting on development financing is of crucial importance. My delegation believes that that meeting should be seen in the two-fold context of follow-up to the major summits and international conferences of the 1990s and of the General Assembly's Agenda for Development.

More than half a century after the creation of the United Nations, there is no further need to prove its relevance and contribution to the disarmament agenda and to building international peace and security. Here I stress the particular importance that Mali attaches to disarmament in general and to micro-disarmament in particular. The establishment of nuclear-weapon-free zones on the basis of arrangements freely entered into among the States of the region concerned, and the extension of such zones to all regions of the world, will make a significant contribution to international peace and security. In that connection, I would recall that Mali has ratified the African Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone Treaty — the Pelindaba Treaty — to manifest its support for the initiative to make Africa a nuclear-weapon-free zone.

However, let us make no mistake about it, what today seriously threatens peace, the security of women, men and children in Africa are small arms and anti-personnel mines.

As we take stock of the progress made in combating the proliferation of small arms since the fifty-third session, while we appreciate the efforts of the United Nations Panel of Governmental Experts, we totally support the appeal for action adopted by the International Conference on Sustainable Disarmament for Sustainable Development, held in Brussels on 12 and 13 October 1998. We should welcome the historic decision of the member countries of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), on the initiative of Mali, to declare a moratorium on the export, import and production of small arms starting on 1 November 1998 and lasting for three years, a moratorium that is supported by a code of conduct. The meeting of the ECOWAS Ministers for Foreign Affairs that was held in Bamako in March 1999, defined the modalities for the implementation of the programme of coordination and assistance for security and development, and adopted a plan of action in nine priority areas to make the moratorium operational. These efforts deserve support from the international community so that there will be more overall cooperation to stem the proliferation of small arms and mitigate their devastating effects.

Also, it is essential to support and extend this moratorium, to apply more strictly the laws and rules in force on arms transfers, to improve them and strengthen them at all levels and to back them up with codes of conduct. We also need to strengthen the capacity of States and increase coordination to deal with this phenomenon. But we also need to work on a progressive and effective international normative mechanism to control the circulation of small arms. We support very strongly the decision of the Assembly to convene an international conference on this question.

Similarly, we must continue our work to free the world of the scourge of anti-personnel mines, and in particular we need to rid Africa of them, for they continue to sow death and mayhem even after conflicts end. We will achieve this by working in the context of the Maputo Declaration and seeing to it that everyone, without exception, ratifies and implements the Convention on the banning of anti-personnel mines. We ratified the Convention very early on, and our country has destroyed its meagre stock of these weapons, which we never in fact used. Mali is now adopting the national legislation required by the Convention on the banning of anti-personnel mines.

In the last 50 years, peacekeeping operations have become an important tool for resolving conflicts by peaceful means and for promoting international peace and security. However, I would like to say that in and of themselves, they are not a solution to conflicts, but only special measures to prevent conflicts from getting worse pending a peaceful solution.

Our constant quest for peace is reflected in our effective participation in peacekeeping operations and our total support for the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution in Africa, to which the international community should give special attention. We ask the international community to mobilize quickly, in good time and to a greater extent to support the immediate implementation of hard-to-reach and always precarious peace agreements, as well as peace-building programmes.

Mali also supports any measures to help create a climate allowing us to confront the causes of conflicts, which now relate primarily to underdevelopment, poor governance, deficiencies in democracy and bad cooperation policies. We pin great hopes on the decision of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) to make the year 2000 a year of peace and security in Africa, and we very much hope that the international community will give strong support to our continent in its prevention and peacekeeping efforts.

I cannot fail to mention here the close link between security and development and the consequent need to finance security as an integral part of development action. Nor can I conclude without mentioning the ghastly, appalling question of child soldiers.

President Konaré has said in this regard,

> "we have an absolute responsibility for the sad lot of child soldiers, which is not acceptable and cannot be borne; we must put an end to it by unambiguously condemning all those who use these children and who instil in them a culture of violence, thus sowing the seeds of the perpetuation of violence and conflicts ... We must work for a real culture of peace. The place of our children is in school; it is our responsibility to put an end to this heinous phenomenon by denouncing it and taking vigorous steps against it, including international criminal sanctions. Post-conflict programmes must include among their priorities the reintegration through education of child soldiers; and in a general way it must make education the heart of the strategy for building peace and sustainable development."

The decision to hold a special session of the General Assembly to follow-up to the World Summit for Children in 2001 coincides with the commemoration of the tenth anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. We must take that opportunity to hasten our attainment of the objectives that we have set for ourselves with regard to children.

We have a unique responsibility towards them. The least we can do on the eve of the new millennium is to provide all boys and girls better health, schools and protection from wars and famines.

Mali is staunchly committed to democracy and human rights. Observance of human, political, civil, economic, social and cultural rights is an integral part of economic prosperity, social equity and the promotion of peace and security. In this context, a certain number of minimum standards are necessary in any democracy based on law and respect for human rights. I am referring to values that we all deem to be fundamental and the observance of which we are committed to: rule of law, respect for human rights, a system of democratic government and the conditions for necessary changes of government in a republican and democratic system. In a democracy, this is the minimum that we must all, each and every one of us, consolidate, build and develop.

The situation in the Middle East remains a source of concern, despite the revival of the peace process. I wish to reaffirm here the unreserved support of Mali for the just struggle of the Palestinian people as well as for a comprehensive just and lasting solution based on the relevant resolutions of the Security Council and the principle of land for peace.

Turning now to the Lockerbie crisis, Mali, basing itself on the progress made in dealing with this question, appeals for the complete, immediate lifting of the sanctions that have been unjustly imposed on the fraternal people of the Libyan Arab Jamahirya, and I am pleased to renew to them the support and solidarity of the people of Mali. Likewise, we are still concerned at the humanitarian cost to civilians in other countries that have been unjustly targeted by sanctions.

Security and stability are facing new threats, including the problem of drugs — which has become worse with globalization — organized crime, international terrorism, money-laundering and corruption. In the face of these threats and their adverse effects of them, the international community must step up its efforts to put in place the mechanisms necessary to eradicate them and cooperate better in order to combat them. In regard to international terrorism, Mali signed the African convention in Algiers, and we support the appeal of the OAU for the speedy conclusion of an international convention in order better to prevent terrorism and to combat it more effectively.

Today, when mankind is preparing for a new millennium, it is essential to adapt the United Nations to the needs of our time. The challenges that we will be facing demand that we adopt appropriate measures now so that the next century will enjoy more peace and more justice in a new partnership based on solidarity among all nations.

If the United Nations is to remain the gathering place in which all countries can make their voices heard to find solutions to problems that confront them, it must not be marginalized. Therefore, it is necessary today more than ever to review the functioning of the system of the Organization in order to adapt it to present and future circumstances.

My delegation is convinced of the need to democratize further our Organization through a comprehensive restructuring of its main organs, particularly the Security Council, the composition of which reflects the state of the world as it was 50 years ago and which does not in any way reflect the political, economic and social realities of today's or tomorrow's world.

In addition, my delegation reaffirms Africa's demand for an equitable division among the two categories of seats. We call upon Member States to reinforce the prestige, the authority, the effectiveness and the legitimacy of the Council.

This session gives the international community a unique opportunity to demonstrate once again that the United Nations is an active, dynamic institution, capable of confronting the major concerns of the world. In order to do this it must prove that, despite the sometimes discouraging complexity of the issues involved and the often divergent national interests of Member States, the Organization is capable of working with determination, creativity and effectiveness for the common good of all. This is what we aspire to.

The President: I now give the floor to the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Japan, His Excellency Mr. Masahiko Koumura.

Mr. Koumura (Japan) (*spoke in Japanese; English text furnished by the delegation*): I would like to extend my heartfelt congratulations to Mr. Theo-Ben Gurirab, Foreign Minister of the Republic of Namibia, on his assumption of the office of President of the General Assembly at its fifty-fourth session. I would also like to pay my respects to Mr. Didier Opertti Badán, Foreign Minister of Uruguay, for all his efforts during his tenure as President of the General Assembly at its fifty-third session. It is also my great pleasure to welcome the admission of the Republic of Kiribati, the Republic of Nauru and the Kingdom of Tonga as new Members of the United Nations.

Permit me on this occasion to extend my heartfelt condolences and sympathy to the people of the Republic of Turkey and the people of Greece, who have suffered greatly as a result of the recent earthquakes in those countries. I also express my deep concern regarding the grave damage caused by the earthquake that occurred in Taiwan early in the morning of 21 September, and extend my heartfelt condolences and sympathy to those who have suffered from the disaster.

This is the last session of the General Assembly before the Millennium Assembly is convened next year. During the one-year period to come, we must identify the issues, such as conflicts and poverty, which the international community will face in the twenty-first century and find an answer to what role the United Nations should play in addressing these issues.

Since its founding in 1945, the United Nations has been dealing with issues of world peace and security, as well as economic and social issues, including development. In the area of peace and security, during the cold-war era, the ability of the Security Council to cope with conflicts was severely restricted. Even under such circumstances, however, the United Nations made creative efforts, such as peacekeeping operations, and achieved certain results in the Middle East and elsewhere. Since the end of the cold war, the number of peacekeeping operations that has been dispatched has increased dramatically, and their mandates have become diversified. Their activities bore fruit, for example, in Cambodia and Mozambique.

Regarding the issues of refugees and displaced persons created by conflicts, the humanitarian assistance activities of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and others are highly appreciated. In the economic and social area, the United Nations, along with its specialized agencies, has raised issues, set standards and implemented those standards in every field, including development, the environment, human rights, science and culture. In the area of development, in addition to efforts undertaken through its programmes and funds, including the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations has achieved certain results in coordinating the assistance activities of the international community. The United Nations has, furthermore, played a decisive role in assessing the public opinion of global society. We should hold in high regard such efforts of the United Nations.

Fully recognizing the significance of the Organization, the people of Japan regarded their country's admission to membership of the United Nations as their country's reinstatement in international society after the Second World War. They have been supporting and contributing to the activities of the United Nations ever since.

There is, however, still much to be done by the United Nations in such areas as the prevention and resolution of conflicts and poverty alleviation. It is also important to have fresh viewpoints, including that of human security, in addressing such new issues as those relating to globalization and other global matters. These are the issues we will be passing along to the twenty-first century.

One of the most important issues that the United Nations must continue to address is conflict. In Africa, conflicts continue in many regions. Although peace has been restored in Kosovo, the conflict there left deep scars on local communities in the region and on the hearts of the people, demonstrating once again the importance of conflict prevention. Furthermore, numerous challenges exist on the path towards future reconstruction. There are persistent tensions in Asia. While various conflicts have been resolved in Latin America, there is still work to be done to achieve stable post-conflict development, including the development of and the clearing of landmines in the border region between Peru and Ecuador, who reached a peace agreement on their border dispute last year.

Regarding the efforts to deal with conflicts, I would like to emphasize the following three points. First, it is important to take a comprehensive approach, which includes conflict prevention and resolution, peacekeeping and peace-building, and the elimination of potential causes of conflict, such as poverty. Secondly, it is necessary to deal with conflicts in a manner that is suitable to the situation in each region. These two points

were also made in the report of the Secretary-General entitled "The causes of conflict and the promotion of durable peace and sustainable development in Africa" (A/52/871), which was issued last year. Thirdly, as regards peace-building, it is necessary that international assistance, from post-conflict emergency humanitarian assistance to long-term development aid, be implemented seamlessly. In addition to these efforts, it has become important to ensure the security of personnel who are engaged in humanitarian or development assistance activities.

In Africa, the United Nations is cooperating in efforts to bring peace in situations of conflict, such as in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Sierra Leone, and in the border dispute between Ethiopia and Eritrea. Japan will consider extending assistance to the efforts of the United Nations as well as to the reconstruction efforts of the countries concerned. We think that efforts to tackle poverty in Africa also contribute to the prevention of conflicts in the region.

With regard to Kosovo, Japan has provided the United Nations Mission in Kosovo with personnel and is actively extending financial support in such areas as humanitarian and reconstruction assistance. It recently dispatched a study mission to explore possible concrete assistance projects.

Turning our attention to Asia, we hope that security in East Timor will be restored at the earliest possible date, through the activities of the multinational force working in coordination with the Government of Indonesia and with the Indonesian armed forces. This force is now starting to be deployed on the basis of the Security Council resolution adopted on 15 September.

Japan has already announced that it will extend a substantial financial contribution to the multinational force. It is making this contribution with the intention of facilitating the participation of developing countries in the effort. Japan will decide the amount of its contribution after the whole picture of the multinational force becomes clear.

The situation of refugees and displaced persons in and outside East Timor causes serious concern. Japan has announced the contribution of a total of $2 million to the activities of UNHCR and the World Food Programme. In addition, it intends to positively consider further assistance after taking into consideration a report from the Government mission now in the region, along with other factors. Furthermore, Japan, in the medium and long term, also intends to provide appropriate assistance for the reconstruction and development of East Timor.

As regards conflict prevention, I wish to commend the Organization of African Unity for already launching efforts to establish an early warning system, and, as regards Asia, I would like to commend the ministerial meeting of the Regional Forum of the Association of South-East Asian Nations for its decision last July to discuss concretely how preventive diplomacy might be dealt with.

Next, I would like to touch upon three issues that are commonly observed in regions in conflict: small arms, anti-personnel landmines, and refugees and displaced persons.

In its efforts to cope with the small arms issue, Japan strongly hopes that the General Assembly will adopt a resolution at this session promoting the recommendations of the report of the Secretary-General drafted by the Panel of Governmental Experts on Small Arms. Japan looks forward to working with other countries for the implementation of those recommendations. Japan will also actively contribute to the successful convening of the international conference on small arms to be held by the end of 2001.

On the issue of anti-personnel landmines, with the entry into force last March of the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-personnel Mines and on Their Destruction, it is now necessary to achieve a universal and effective ban on anti-personnel landmines and to clear the mine areas, while extending assistance to mine victims, among whom are many children. Japan has contributed financial assistance of more than $40 million to international and non-governmental organizations and will continue to strive to achieve the goal of "zero victims" at an early date.

With regard to the issue of refugees and displaced persons, Japan highly commends the activities of UNHCR and others and intends to continue to actively cooperate with them.

Since the end of the cold war, international efforts have achieved certain results with respect to the non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, including nuclear weapons, and their delivery vehicles — namely, missiles — as well as arms reduction. Yet the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons

(NPT) regime has been challenged by the nuclear testing or secret development of weapons of mass destruction conducted by some States.

Japan calls upon the nuclear-weapon and the non-nuclear-weapon States alike to take constructive actions to ensure the successful convening of the Review Conference of the Parties to the NPT next spring. Japan also calls upon the States that have not yet done so to promptly sign and ratify the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty so that it can enter into force as soon as possible, and appeals to every country to respect the moratorium on nuclear testing. Further, it is also important to reactivate the START process and promptly to commence the negotiations on the fissile material cut-off treaty.

Japan has consistently called for realistic measures for nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament. Every year since 1994, it has submitted to the General Assembly a resolution on nuclear disarmament with a view to the ultimate elimination of nuclear weapons. Late last July, the Tokyo Forum on Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Disarmament, which was established at Japan's initiative, issued its report, which we believe provides a realistic guideline for progress in nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament. Japan would like to consult actively with other countries with a view to implementing the meaningful recommendations contained in the report.

The importance of addressing the issue of weapons of mass destruction other than nuclear weapons, such as biological and chemical weapons, as well as the issue of delivery vehicles, including missiles, is beyond discussion. In particular, Japan will work towards the early conclusion of negotiations on the protocol to the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production and Stockpiling of Bacteriological (Biological) and Toxin Weapons and on Their Destruction.

With regard to the North Korean missile issue, Japan appreciates and welcomes the important progress achieved in the recent United States-North Korea talks. Japan strongly hopes that North Korea's moratorium on missile launching is further assured.

Poverty continues to be a serious issue in many regions of the world. There is a vicious cycle in which the frequent occurrence of regional conflicts exacerbates the problem of poverty, while poverty in turn causes the occurrence and recurrence of regional conflicts. Indeed, poverty should be recognized as the primary issue of the twenty-first century, and it is incumbent upon various players, such as the United Nations, other international organizations, States and civil society, to cooperate towards its eradication.

At the Second Tokyo International Conference on African Development, which was co-organized by Japan, the United Nations and others last October, the Tokyo Agenda for Action was adopted, which encourages African countries to take initiatives on their own; calls for the strengthening of cooperation between African countries and developed countries as well as international organizations; and calls for the promotion of cooperation between Asia and Africa. Japan will remain actively engaged with the issue of poverty in Africa through follow-up efforts for the implementation of the Agenda for Action, such as the debt- management seminar which Japan co-organized with the United Nations and others last month in Kenya.

Japan has been the world's largest donor of official development assistance since 1991. Despite the severity of its domestic budgetary situation, it will continue to extend effective, efficient and high-quality official development assistance and will tackle poverty problems through the further promotion of cooperation with the relevant organizations of the United Nations.

Debt problems are making it extremely difficult for debtor nations, especially the poorest countries, to achieve development. Japan has provided assistance through debt rescheduling and grant aid for debt relief, and will take comprehensive measures to deal with the debt problem, including the steady implementation of the commitment made at the G-8 summit meeting in Cologne.

Important conferences, such as special sessions of the General Assembly, are being held successively in the areas of economic and social development and human rights. The General Assembly's special session on population and development was held this June, at which meaningful proposals for future action were adopted. The sustainable development of small island developing States, which are susceptible to the effects of climate change and are also geographically vulnerable, is the very important subject of the twenty-second special session to begin on 27 September. The development of landlocked States, which are also geographically disadvantaged, is important as well.

The promotion of the implementation of the Copenhagen Declaration and the Programme of Action

adopted at the World Summit for Social Development in 1995 will be discussed next year at a follow-up special session. The General Assembly special session entitled "Women 2000" will also be held next year in order to further promote the results of the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women. Building upon the achievements of these special sessions, Japan intends to contribute actively to international cooperative endeavours in these areas.

This is the final year of the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction. The international community must take prompt and concerted action in responding to large-scale natural disasters, as clearly underscored by our experience with the recent earthquakes in Turkey and Greece, last year's hurricanes in Latin America and the tsunami in Papua New Guinea. The United Nations is required to play a more active role in this endeavour. Moreover, efforts in the area of natural-disaster reduction need to be strengthened. Recognizing the importance of natural disaster reduction in the context of development policy and environmental issues, Japan will promote efforts in this field.

With regard to the advancement of globalization, while taking advantage of the new opportunities it provides for the revitalization of the world economy, the improvement in living standards, the creation of jobs, and development, we must also address its negative effects, such as the growing instability in international finance and the widening gap between the rich and the poor. Japan is steadily carrying out financial assistance measures totaling approximately $80 billion, including the New Miyazawa Initiative — by far the largest package of assistance provided by one country — for the East Asian countries which were hard hit by the economic crisis. We strongly expect the economic recovery of the region to resume and that a sound and sustainable development of the world economy will be achieved.

We are also concerned that globalization may aggravate such problems as environmental destruction, international organized crime, drug, terrorism and the spread of infectious diseases. These global issues, which transcend national borders and pose direct threats to each and every person, need to be dealt with by the international community as a whole. It is necessary that we adopt policies that give consideration to women, children and others, who are most susceptible to the effect of these global issues.

Although globalization also engenders creativity by facilitating interaction among various cultures and different value systems, due consideration also needs to be paid to the cultural diversity of the world. From this standpoint, we consider that the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization will play an even more important role in the coming century.

Japan has been stressing the importance of addressing the various issues I have just mentioned by focusing efforts on human security, that is, the protection of the dignity and life of every person against the many threats posed, for example, by poverty; the outflow of refugees; environmental issues; infectious diseases, such as AIDS; human rights violations; international organized crime, including human and drug trafficking; conflicts; anti-personnel landmines and small arms; and terrorism.

Last June Japan hosted the International Symposium on Development, at which the issue of how to encourage the self-reliance of individuals to escape from poverty was discussed. On the initiative of Prime Minister Obuchi, Japan established the Human Security Fund within the United Nations to support the activities of international organizations and to promote human security. Japan recently announced its contribution of $100 million for reconstruction and assistance for the return of refugees in Kosovo, and it will implement that assistance through the Human Security Fund and other sources.

It cannot be said that the efforts of the United Nations to address the issues that will confront the international community in the twenty-first century are sufficient. Nevertheless, it is not right to claim that the United Nations is incapable of addressing those issues adequately, and therefore disregard it. Neither is it right to simply deplore any attempt to disregard the Organization. In as much as many issues today require efforts of the international community as a whole, and as there is no other universal and comprehensive institution that can replace the United Nations, our only recourse is to reform and strengthen the United Nations, so that it will be capable of dealing with the issues adequately. From this viewpoint, I would like in particular to make the following three points.

The first is the need for Security Council reform. During the 50 or so years since the end of the Second World War, the international situation has undergone dramatic changes. Given those changes, the functions of the Security Council, as the body primarily responsible for the maintenance of international peace and security, need to be strengthened. Towards that end, it is essential

that the Security Council be re-created to reflect the present international situation, with reform of the composition of both its permanent and non-permanent membership. Japan would like to assume greater responsibilities as a permanent member of the Security Council.

Second, there is an urgent need for reforms to place the United Nations on a sound financial base. It is necessary for Member States to fulfil their obligation to pay their assessed contributions, and for the United Nations to work to further control its budget. Despite the severe economic and financial situations, Japan has been faithfully fulfilling its obligation to pay its assessed contribution and has been making substantial contributions to the United Nations and related organizations. However, as the Security Council reform has not been realized, and as the necessary budgetary reforms have yet to be carried out, one cannot but question the fairness of a situation in which Japan is expected to pay an assessed contribution that exceeds the sum of the contributions made by four of the permanent members of the Security Council, not including the United States.

Third, it is necessary for the United Nations to strengthen its efforts in the economic and social area, including development. The Organization is expected to obtain the active participation of various actors in addressing problems in the economic and social area, and effectively coordinate their efforts. Japan attaches importance to the role that the United Nations, especially the Economic and Social Council, plays in this area, and is determined, if it is elected this year, to work as a member of the Council towards strengthening the activities of the United Nations in such areas as the coordination between the United Nations agencies, the promotion of dialogue with Bretton Woods institutions and the broad participation by civil society in activities in this area, and coordination of these activities.

We have already devoted a significant amount of time to the discussion of United Nations reform. Today there is a common recognition throughout the international community that the reform of the United Nations is necessary. Indeed, there is not a single country that is opposed to reform per se. Nevertheless, progress towards reform is far from satisfactory. The amount of time that has been expended in discussions so far tells of the difficulty that lies in the way of reforming an organization. We must recognize at the very core of our being that if we fail to strengthen the United Nations through reforms, international trust in the Organization will be undermined. This would not only destroy the United Nations, but would be suicidal to all the Member States and the international community as a whole.

The Millennium Assembly and the Millennium Summit, scheduled for next year, will provide an occasion on which the United Nations can demonstrate to the world that it is capable of effectively tackling the issues that the international community will face in the twenty-first century. The efforts which Member States make during the one-year period to come could very well determine the viability of the United Nations in the coming century. I would like, therefore, to conclude my remarks by calling upon all Member States to cooperate with each other in pursuing the common interests of the international community as a whole.

The President: I now call on the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs of Austria, Her Excellency Mrs. Benita Ferrero-Waldner.

Mrs. Ferrero-Waldner (Austria): Mr. President, first let me congratulate you on your election to your high office and assure you of the full cooperation and support of the Austrian delegation. I am convinced that we will have a successful session of the General Assembly, the last in this century, under your able guidance.

Austria fully endorses the statement which was so eloquently delivered by the Foreign Minister of Finland on behalf of the European Union. I would like to add the following observations to that very comprehensive statement.

The United Nations in many ways finds itself at a crossroads. The Organization has to find its role and strengthen its relevance in an increasingly turbulent world. To be sure, we are able to make progress on specific issues. But is that enough in the face of mounting global challenges? Much has been said and written in the last few years about globalization, and I believe we are all aware of the speed and impact of this very dynamic process. What we still need is a coherent political response to this phenomenon. We have to meet the challenges and make the best possible use of the opportunities presented to us.

While our everyday work must be focused on reaching achievable goals within a realistic time, we must never lose sight of our larger duty to provide human security in its fullest sense. This means that we have to provide individuals and communities with security,

dignity and quality of life. We have to protect them against threats to their safety and well-being, such as conflict, discrimination, poverty, organized crime, corruption or repression.

In recent years, a number of initiatives have been successfully launched, in particular on landmines, small arms and child soldiers. Austria is working very actively to promote the human security agenda, and I would like to highlight three priority areas: human rights education, the fight against child pornography and the fight against what the Secretary-General has aptly termed the uncivil society. On the occasion of the twentieth anniversary of the presence of the United Nations in Vienna next month, we will organize a high-level meeting on these and other aspects of human security.

Most threats to human security have a human rights dimension. This is why a human rights security agenda must include an overall strategy aimed at the strengthening of a worldwide human rights culture. Recent events in Kosovo or East Timor have shown that the most basic rights cannot be taken for granted. Again and again we will have to assert the universality and indivisibility of human rights. We therefore stress the importance of human rights education, which is essential for the promotion and the achievement of stable and harmonious relations within countries and among communities. We must redouble our efforts in support of the United Nations Decade for Human Rights Education. Next year's mid-term evaluation of progress made in the Decade provides an ideal opportunity. Institutions and organizations with specialized expertise in our countries should identify specific ideas for further action on human rights education activities at national level, in foreign policy, and in the context of development cooperation.

Every man and every woman must know his or her rights in order to become a full and equal member of society. People must be provided at the national and the international level with effective remedies for human rights violations. We therefore welcome the successful conclusion of negotiations on the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women. Its adoption by the General Assembly and its early entry into force will have great significance for women around the world.

Human security starts in the smallest entities of our society. The mutual learning process within families is one of human beings' most valuable experiences. The family, as the fundamental unit of society and the natural environment for the growth and well-being of all of its members, should be afforded the necessary protection and assistance so that it can fully assume its responsibilities within the community, because it is within the family, first and foremost, where children, the most vulnerable group in society, seek support and protection.

Millions of children are being exploited worldwide. Their basic human rights are being denied in many ways. For some time now, and in particular during the Austrian presidency of the European Union, Vice-Chancellor and Foreign Minister Schüssel has been trying to focus attention on one particular aspect: child pornography on the Internet. Next week, Austria will host an international conference on combating child pornography on the Internet. Organized by Austria, the European Commission and the United States of America, the conference will bring together high-level officials from Ministries of the Interior and Justice, the judiciary and the police, experts from international organizations, non-governmental organizations and the industry, especially Internet service providers. The United Nations system will be represented by experts from the United Nations Children's Fund and the United Nations Centre for International Crime Prevention. The main objectives of the conference are to reinforce cooperation between law enforcement officials and the judiciary, establish codes of conduct for Internet service providers and the further development of hotlines and networks between them. The results of this initiative will be presented to the United Nations.

The fight against drugs and transnational organized crime has rightly been accorded priority status in the work of the United Nations. I am glad that the reform measures introduced by Secretary-General Kofi Annan have reaffirmed Vienna's role as the United Nations centre for fighting uncivil elements in society.

Austria is particularly worried by reports about the situation in Afghanistan, where the areas under poppy cultivation area apparently doubled in 1998. We are therefore appealing to all partners to enhance their efforts in assisting the United Nations International Drug Control Programme (UNDCP) to combat the cultivation and production of drugs in that region and elsewhere. As a practical contribution to this effort, Austria will sponsor a UNDCP training seminar for Central Asian drug authorities this autumn. Austria strongly believes that drug control is, above all, in the interests of our children and future generations.

In April 2000, the first United Nations conference in the new millennium, the Tenth United Nations Congress on the Prevention of Crime and the Treatment of Offenders, will take place in Vienna. The key issues contained in the preliminary draft of the Vienna Declaration on Crime and Justice: Meeting the Challenges of the Twenty-First Century (E/1999/30-E/CN.15/1999/12, para. 3), whose final forum will be adopted at the Congress, address the most burning questions in international crime prevention: trafficking in human beings, smuggling migrants and illicit transfers of firearms.

In this context, I can say with satisfaction that the Austrian initiative to elaborate an international legal instrument against the smuggling of migrants, which Austria presented to the General Assembly two years ago, has gathered a great deal of support among United Nations Member States. Currently, intensive negotiations within the framework of the Ad Hoc Committee on the Elaboration of a Convention against Organized Transnational Crime are being held and will hopefully be concluded next year with the adoption of a universal protocol against the smuggling of migrants.

The last of the series of world Conferences in the 1990s showed that an innovative yet pragmatic approach can work. This was the Third United Nations Conference on the Exploration and Peaceful Uses of Outer Space, UNISPACE III, which took place in Vienna in July this year. The Conference focused on the question of how to ensure that space technology will benefit humanity in the twenty-first century and that it is used effectively to promote security in all its forms for the benefit of all countries. It has provided developing countries with opportunities to define their needs for space applications for development purposes and to identify ways and possibilities for them to participate in international programmes which develop these applications. UNISPACE III was both a novel and a successful type of Conference in bringing together industry and academia, and young people, as equal partners and incorporating their insights into the final documents.

In the twenty-first century, the United Nations and the international community will be judged by their capacity to prevent armed conflict. At a time when the world's problems appear to be growing and the resources to tackle those problems seem to be shrinking, we must be more strategic than ever in devising new ways to approach these challenges.

Again and again we have had to face the fact that the international community is not in the position to bridge the gap between early warning and early action. In future, efficient mechanisms will have to be implemented by international organizations in order to act at an early stage. In our response to looming refugee crises, much faster action is needed to avoid human catastrophes like the ones we have witnessed in Kosovo and East Timor.

As part of its development cooperation concept, Austria is currently working on a comprehensive strategy for conflict prevention which combines all available measures, from facilitation and mediation to a targeted use of the instruments of development cooperation. Austria is actively involved in the Arusha peace process for Burundi and is offering a broad range of seminars and training programmes on preventive diplomacy, in particular with its partners in Africa. Austria's development cooperation aims to promote both sustainable development and sustainable peace.

Austria has always lent its active support to United Nations efforts to maintain international peace and security. Since 1960, it has been one of the major contributors to United Nations peacekeeping missions. At the moment, more than 1,500 Austrian troops, civilian police, military observers and civilian experts are serving in United Nations peacekeeping, and other United Nations mandated operations, and in missions in which regional organizations are participating — from Kosovo to East Timor, and from Western Sahara to Tajikistan. We will continue to do our utmost to assist the United Nations in its efforts to enhance stability in many areas of tension around the world.

If we are to cope with all these challenges, we clearly have to reinforce the rule of law in international relations. A large part of the legal basis already exists. What is needed to make it work is our common political will to monitor and to ensure its application. This can only happen in the framework of the United Nations, in particular through the Security Council.

In view of the United Nations primary responsibility for the maintenance of peace and security, it is crucial that the United Nations prove its ability to act quickly and decisively in conflict situations. The decisive action taken during the Gulf war in 1990-1991 raised international hopes and expectations for the future.

But already during the terrible conflicts in the territory of the former Yugoslavia, particularly in Bosnia and Herzegovina, it took the Organization much longer to find a successful crisis solution. It only managed to do so by applying a sensible subcontracting policy with regional organizations. The recent tragedies in Kosovo and East Timor have both brought the United Nations and the Security Council to the brink of being perceived in international public opinion as ineffective or unable to act.

The Security Council, which carries the primary responsibility for international peace and security, must maintain its ability to act. It cannot be seen to be driven by the subjective interest of members rather than by an objective assessment of real requirements. It goes without saying that the permanent members bear a particular responsibility in this regard, which includes financial obligations. The privileges of permanent membership come with a heavy obligation: to act whenever necessary. If a peace operation has to be established, it must not matter whether the conflict situation is located in an area of little strategic interest or whether the country in question maintains unwelcome relations with another entity. Its mandate and size must be based on the conditions on the ground, and not depend on anybody's willingness to finance it. Should the Security Council be seen to be unable to fulfil these functions, we will have to heed the call for reforms, including the role of its permanent members.

On East Timor, the Security Council has finally lived up to its special responsibilities assigned to it under the Charter. This proves that the international community must act decisively when confronted with massive violations of international humanitarian law and human rights.

Austria welcomes Security Council resolution 1264 (1999) authorizing a multinational force for East Timor under Chapter VII and the commitment of the Indonesian Government to cooperate with this force in the implementation of the mandate. We hope that this initiative will contribute to bringing about national reconciliation, lasting peace and respect for the will of the people of East Timor, expressed so clearly during the consultations on 30 August 1999. Austria underlines the necessity to urgently provide humanitarian assistance, and will also contribute to these efforts.

The vote on the future of East Timor must be respected by all sides. Austria, while underlining its desire to see a strong, democratic and united Indonesia, looks forward to recognizing East Timor once the process towards independence is complete.

Austria sharply condemns the atrocities committed in recent weeks. Those who planned, authorized or executed these acts must be held individually and personally accountable and be brought to justice.

After a long impasse the peace process in the Middle East is back on track. Austria greatly welcomes the memorandum signed by Israel and the Palestinians at Sharm el-Sheikh, which removes the obstacles to the implementation of the Wye Agreement. Furthermore, we have taken note with satisfaction that implementation on the ground has already begun. Here I should especially like to point to the handing over of territory, the release of Palestinian prisoners and the beginning of the final status negotiations. This clear commitment of the parties should augur well for further speedy progress on the road to peace. Now it will also be necessary to bring about new momentum in the Syrian/Lebanese track of the peace process by relaunching the negotiations between Israel, Syria and Lebanon. I think that all parties agree that peace and mutual understanding are the only viable option for a prosperous future for all nations in the Middle East region.

The western Balkans, being geographically so close to Austria, will remain in the foreground of Austrian foreign policy. The most burning problem is currently the situation in Kosovo, which merits the joint attention of the international community. I would like to commend the work which has already been carried out by the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) and by KFOR, and the progress realized so far, in spite of such difficult circumstances. True, in the implementation of Security Council resolution 1244 (1999), and in our efforts to bring Kosovo back to normalcy, there are delays and setbacks, in particular the insecurity, the tensions in Kosovska Mitrovica, and the exodus of the majority of Kosovo Serbs and other non-Albanians. Nevertheless, one must not forget the paramount importance of the Kosovo issue for the stability of the whole Balkan area, which is why we must not become discouraged when we meet problems. Rather, we have to understand them as an incentive to redouble our efforts. Yesterday's demilitarization agreement between KFOR and the UCK is, I would say, a very encouraging step in the right direction.

In addition to setting up a functioning civil administration, including police, creating a democratic

political atmosphere respectful of human rights, repatriating over 1 million refugees, and reconstructing the infrastructure and the economic life of Kosovo, it is UNMIK's crucial task to facilitate a political process leading to a definite status of the province. This is a very complicated endeavour, which requires sound and prudent preparation. We must not try to rush things, since it is clear that stability and reconciliation have to be established and solidified before we can tackle the final status question.

The same holds true for Montenegro. We must, and we will continue to, support the Montenegrin reform process, and we must not allow forces in Belgrade to undercut those pluralistic and economic improvements. For the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia as a whole, we will continue to work towards democratization, political reform and respect for human and minority rights. Upon such changes — which are not only urgently necessary but which are also yearned for by the Serb and Yugoslav people — Yugoslavia should, and will, take its rightful place in the international community.

In spite of some progress made by Bosnia and Herzegovina, it still needs and deserves our intense help — both politically and financially. At the same time, it is increasingly necessary for the Bosnians themselves to take on more responsibility for their future and to start a process of decoupling themselves from dependency on international assistance.

Let me emphasize at this juncture Austria's strong belief in the protection and promotion of minorities in general. This attitude is based on historic experience and the conviction that ethnic minorities constitute a true enrichment of our societies.

It is of interest for the international community to recall that there are existing successful settlements of important minority issues in Europe. In particular, I think of the Austrian minority in the South Tyrol, which today enjoys a well-balanced autonomy on the basis of the Paris Treaty of 1946 between Austria and Italy. Time and again it has been noted that this formula could be an example for the settlement of minority disputes in other parts of the world.

Though regional organizations and coalitions of the willing have credibly shown their readiness to take on responsibilities in the maintenance of international peace and security, the United Nations continues to provide the indispensable political, legal and institutional links to ensure the acceptance, legitimacy and accountability of their respective efforts.

The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) plays a central role in promoting peace, security and stability in the regional context, in particular through its broad range of activities in the area of conflict prevention, crisis management and post-conflict rehabilitation. The broad scope and complex nature of the security challenges in the region requires a pluri-institutional response. But that implies also an effective cooperation among the institutions concerned. The OSCE, as a regional arrangement according to Chapter VIII of the Charter of the United Nations, is closely cooperating with the United Nations in many fields and regions, such as in Kosovo. In our capacity as the next Chairman-in-Office of the OSCE, we will continue the efforts to strengthen the relationship between the OSCE and the United Nations at both the political and field levels.

Let me conclude by confirming Austria's strong commitment to the United Nations. In a little less than one year, our Heads of State or Government will participate in the millennium summit. I hope that this will be the occasion to unlock the potential of the Organization. We must use the wonderful tool of our Organization as it was meant to be used: to ensure our survival on this planet in peace, freedom and dignity. On spaceship Earth the supplies are limited, so we have to make the best possible use of them. Whatever our differences, we all know what needs to be done. Let us find the political will to do it.

The President: I now give the floor to the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, His Excellency Mr. Borys Tarasyuk.

Mr. Tarasyuk (Ukraine): Allow me first of all, Sir, to extend my most sincere congratulations on your election to the presidency of the fifty-fourth session of the General Assembly and to wish you every success in discharging this extremely responsible mission. This election is a well-deserved tribute to the personal qualities of the dean of African Foreign Ministers, as well as evidence of the indisputable authority your country enjoys among the members of the international community. The active and responsible position of Namibia as a member of the Security Council serves as another confirmation that the right choice was made by this General Assembly.

I would also like to express our gratitude to your predecessor, Mr. Didier Opertti, for his effective organization of the work of the fifty-third session of the General Assembly. In addition, I have the pleasure to greet three new United Nations Members — Kiribati, the Republic of Nauru and the Kingdom of Tonga. Ukraine sincerely welcomes them into our family.

The twentieth century will remain, in the history of mankind, as one of unprecedented ideological clashes, with subsequent divisions of the world. The last 10 years, however, have been marked by an *entente universelle* to build this world on the basis of respect for cultural diversity and universally recognized values. This tumultuous period of transition from bloc rivalry to rapprochement and cooperation obviously lacks stability and clear vision. That is why the role of the United Nations, a firm anchor in these troubled waters, takes on increasing and immense importance for all of its Member States.

I would like to place special emphasis on one fundamental factor that determines the significance of the United Nations and makes it universally meaningful. On the eve of the twenty-first century, we have to admit that humankind is still far from achieving the purposes proclaimed in the Charter of the United Nations. But at the same time, we must recognize that this document, which has withstood the test of time, has remained the most ambitious yet most realistic code of world order for more than half a century. There exists no alternative to the order defined by the rules and principles of the United Nations, as no alternative exists to the Organization itself, which is destined to be the centre for the coordinated actions of nations in achieving and maintaining such an order.

This vision of the Organization's significance to international life is what has prompted Ukraine to take an active position in carrying out concerted efforts aimed at strengthening the United Nations. Two years ago, we all welcomed the programme of institutional reforms put forward by the Secretary-General, which were designed to adapt and update the Organization and to ensure its ability to promptly respond to the challenges of our time. That powerful start, however, dwindled to a slow pace, while our initial optimism and our readiness to go ahead with the programme of reforms of the United Nations remained largely unrealized.

This sort of criticism is all the more pertinent when it comes to the reform of the principal United Nations organ entrusted with primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security. For years, all of us seemed to be in agreement on the need to modernize the Security Council and replenish it with new energy and fresh ideas. I am confident that a new impetus should be given to the work of the Working Group on Security Council reform to get the matter off the ground in the course of the current session.

What could our response be to the challenges that have haunted humankind for the last 55 years? First, the most important conclusion that we can draw from all of the United Nations deficiencies is this: for the Organization to manage to unite nations around basic universal values, it must have adequate tools to protect these values. Universal values must enjoy full support by means of legal, political, economic and military enforcement.

Secondly, the age of confrontation is giving way to an age of cooperation. We should create a world order in which it would be in no one's self-interest to wage wars, oppress national minorities or exert economic pressure on other nations. A broad and ramified system of regional and subregional cooperation would serve this purpose by upholding a universal code of conduct.

In this context, I wish to refer to the recent summit held in the Ukrainian city of Yalta, called "Baltic-Black Sea Cooperation: to the Integrated Europe of the 21st Century Without Dividing Lines". It would be no exaggeration to say that there is here an unavoidable parallel with Yalta 1945. That post-war summit was an example of how three people decided the fate of the world and divided Europe. Yalta 1999, on the contrary, was evidence of how 22 neighbouring countries found sufficient motivation to resolve their problems together and be unanimous in determining their future in a United Europe.

We are particularly encouraged by the increased attention paid by the Security Council and the United Nations in general to humanitarian issues. A major lesson learned from the eruption of numerous local and regional conflicts is that there is an obvious and urgent need to respond to the challenges posed by humanitarian crises and flagrant mass violations of human rights.

The primary role of the Security Council in maintaining and restoring international peace must be reiterated. This role is expressed in the clear and proud language of the Charter. The past and continuing experience of the Council underscores the importance of

the adoption of a holistic approach that brings into prominence both security and humanitarian issues. As Secretary-General Kofi Annan imaginatively put it yesterday, a global era requires global engagement, and the collective interest is the national interest.

How can this ambitious goal be achieved? An important step forward towards the goal of protecting human life and dignity is, of course, the ongoing process of establishing the International Criminal Court. Today, a year after the remarkable conclusion of the Rome Diplomatic Conference, we are pleased to observe that the significance of the adoption of the Court's Statute is widely and rightly recognized as it relates not only to the codification and progressive development of international law but also to the system of international security in the next century.

It is this perception of the nature and purposes of the future judicial institution that determines the position of the Government of Ukraine with regard to the signing of the Rome Statute. I would like to take this opportunity to inform representatives that Ukraine intends to sign the Statute in the course of the current session of the General Assembly.

Guided by its belief that the United Nations and regional organizations should play a key role in conflict prevention, Ukraine was one of the first to come forward with peace proposals during the initial stage of the Kosovo crisis. The peace plan of President Kuchma of Ukraine proved to be realistic, since most of its provisions were consonant with the provisions of Security Council resolution 1244 (1999).

For years, Ukraine has been active in United Nations peacekeeping operations. Last July, the President and the Parliament of Ukraine decided to send an 800-strong contingent from Ukraine to participate in KFOR. The Ukrainian military have gained a very positive profile, merited by their earlier service in the United Nations Protection Force, the Implementation Force and the Stabilization Force in Bosnia. Their expertise and contributions outweighed by far the financial costs entailed. We fully recognize our share of responsibility in the common cause of restoring and strengthening peace in the Balkans.

At the same time, recent events in Kosovo and East Timor provide evidence that we should continue to increase the level of security for peacekeepers. As a co-author of the Convention on the Safety of United Nations and Associated Personnel, Ukraine appeals for the elaboration of further practical measures to implement its provisions.

The lesson of Kosovo proves that as long as human rights or the rights of national minorities and international law are ignored, the world will continue to be threatened by humanitarian disasters. It is therefore necessary to pay special attention to regions with so-called frozen conflicts: areas with the potential for new outbursts of violence, refugee flows and economic recession. As a guarantor of peaceful settlement in Transdniestria, Moldova, and an active supporter of the peace process in Abkhazia, Georgia, and in Nagorny Karabakh, Azerbaijan, Ukraine is doing its utmost to translate the relevant agreements into real peace settlements.

Joint efforts are also necessary in post-conflict rehabilitation. Ukraine therefore welcomes both the idea and the adoption of the Stability Pact for South-Eastern Europe and is actively proposing specific projects in cooperation with its neighbours. The purpose of the Pact is not only to help reconstruct the Balkans but, most importantly, to give those countries a clear perspective on European integration.

Integration into European and Euro-Atlantic structures remains the key priority of Ukraine's foreign policy. Membership in the family of European nations and sharing common values means economic growth, stable democratic development and the consolidation of the European identity of Ukrainians. At the regional level, Ukraine is an active participant in the Organization for Black Sea Economic Cooperation, the Council of the Baltic Sea States, the Central European Initiative and the GUUAM forum, to which Georgia, Ukraine, Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan and Moldova belong.

I have already mentioned the Yalta Conference and the summit of the leaders of Baltic and Black Sea States. In addition, last May Ukraine hosted a summit meeting of eight Central European States. We are developing confidence-building measures on a bilateral basis with our neighbours and in a multilateral framework to reduce naval military activity in the Black Sea region. Pursuing the line that intensive cooperation is the best remedy for conflicts, Ukraine is engaged in various trilateral cooperative agreements promoting free economic areas and transborder projects.

As one of the founders of the United Nations, Ukraine continues to make its contribution to United Nations efforts in strengthening international peace and

security, the non-proliferation regime, disarmament and arms control, crisis management, the promotion of economic and social development, human rights and freedoms and compliance with the fundamental principles of international law. By fostering internal harmony in society, creating an environment of stability and shaping a vast network of regional cooperation, Ukraine is striving to make the fullest possible use of its rich experience and constructive potential for the benefit of the whole international community.

Over three years ago, Ukraine voluntarily renounced its nuclear stockpile — the third largest in the world — and it is strictly abiding by its commitments as a non-nuclear State. We should multiply our efforts to enhance the efficiency and universality of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT). In this context, it is of the utmost importance to break the stalemate in the preparatory process for the 2000 NPT Review Conference.

Ukraine has signed the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) and is now successfully completing legislative procedures to fulfil its international obligations under this Treaty. Last February, our country became a party to the Ottawa Convention banning the use of anti-personnel landmines, while in March Ukraine's Government decided to prolong the moratorium on exports of all types of anti-personnel landmines.

My country is ready to participate in the development of collective measures to fight the proliferation of and illegal trafficking in small arms and light weapons. We support the initiative of Canada and the Netherlands to establish an international regime for the control of light weapons and to start negotiations on working out a convention on the prevention and combating of the illegal transportation of firearms and light weapons.

Aware of the danger of the uncontrolled circulation and accumulation of conventional weapons, Ukraine strictly abides by Security Council and General Assembly resolutions imposing restrictions on international arms trafficking. All of these factors explain Ukraine's ambition to be elected as a non-permanent member of the Security Council. Our ambition is particularly strong since it is our first bid for this seat as an independent State.

If elected, Ukraine would base its position in the Security Council on the following fundamental principles: paying adequate attention to conflicts and tense situations in different parts of the world, judging them by the real requirements of each particular case; using all political and diplomatic means available to the Security Council to prevent or manage conflicts; increasing the importance of the humanitarian dimension among the Council's priorities; and enhancing the ability of non-members of the Security Council to influence the decision-making process in that body. In addition, there is a need to analyse the present mechanism of sanctions to ensure that their imposition is balanced and well-grounded, in particular taking into account eventual negative consequences for third countries.

Ukraine remains deeply concerned at the problems of Africa. Our concerns are nurtured by the strong traditional ties of friendship that unite Ukraine with African nations. One could hardly disagree that Africa is a continent with unlimited potential for economic and social development. At the same time, it is absolutely imperative that the international community take very concrete and effective steps to assist African States in developing that potential and in responding to the challenges facing their continent.

Nowadays it is difficult to blame the United Nations for the lack of attention to Africa. For example, at this very moment, the members of the Security Council are responding to a briefing on recent developments in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, given by the President of the Republic of Zambia, His Excellency Mr. Frederick Chiluba. In just a few days, the Security Council will hold another meeting to reaffirm its commitment to the cause of peace and prosperity in Africa. I intend to present my delegation's contribution to the deliberations of the Council, and will make more specific remarks on this matter in the course of that meeting. At the same time, Ukraine hopes that commitment to Africa on the part of the Security Council and the United Nations as a whole will be reflected in concrete deeds that benefit Africa.

The situation in the Middle East requires closer attention by the Security Council. We believe that the Security Council should send strong encouragement to all the parties to the Middle East peace process. It is time to come back to the negotiating table to find a final compromise solution to the pending problems on the basis of the relevant Security Council resolutions. In that context, Ukraine welcomes the recent signing of the Sharm el-Sheikh Memorandum on 4 September, brought about thanks to the constructive approach of the new Israeli Government and to the position taken by the Palestinian leadership.

East Timor continues to be a hot spot. Ukraine welcomed the success of the 30 August 1999 popular consultation of the East Timorese people, which was possible thanks to the constructive position taken by the Government of Indonesia and the active intermediary mission of the Secretary-General. Ukraine supported the Security Council's adoption of its resolution 1264 (1999), which authorized the establishment of a multinational force pursuant to the request of the Government of Indonesia.

The past year has been marked by an unprecedented outbreak of terrorist acts in various parts of the world. We are convinced that intensified international efforts to combat terrorism need a more concentrated focus on the underlying causes of this extremely acute international phenomenon, on its deep social roots and on relevant historical conditions, as well as on situations that may give rise to international terrorism and endanger international peace and security. At the same time, whatever actions are undertaken at the international, regional or national levels, they must all be in full conformity with the basic principles of international law and must not run counter to the fundamental provisions of the United Nations Charter.

Underdevelopment and impoverishment, the threat of marginalization, the burden of external debt, a lack of resources, and ecological disasters pose a real threat to international peace and sustainable development. Circumstances such as the global financial crisis and the war in Kosovo have considerably impeded economic progress in many parts of the world. Ukraine has managed to curb its losses and maintain macroeconomic stabilization since August 1998. On the other hand, the curtailment of navigation on the Danube has paralysed economic the activities of Ukrainian shipping companies, ports and enterprises. The total accumulated losses of Ukraine amount today to more than $300 million. Together with Romania, Bulgaria and other interested parties, we are ready to clear the waterway for the soonest possible resumption of navigation as the best way to cope with the humanitarian hardships of Balkan peoples.

Speaking about global issues requiring joint efforts of the international community, I must again emphasize the problem of Chernobyl, which is so painful for Ukraine and for its neighbours, Belarus and Russia. Our country is meeting its commitments to decommission the Chernobyl nuclear power plant as envisaged in the memorandum of understanding between the Government of Ukraine and Governments of the Group of Seven and the European Union. It therefore has every ground to expect the fulfilment by its partners of their obligations. We welcomed the statement issued by the Group of Seven in Cologne last June regarding the convening of a second pledging conference for the mobilization of financial resources to implement the working plan on the transformation of the Shelter facility into an ecologically safe system. We consider this to be a confirmation by our partners of their commitment to the memorandum of understanding.

From this rostrum I call upon all potential donors to take part in that conference and to make pledges to the Chernobyl Shelter fund, to enable it to reach the required amount of just $770 million. According to the Human Development Report published by the United Nations Development Programme, expenditures for cigarettes in Europe amounted to $50 billion in 1998 alone. Compared to this, the amount needed for Chernobyl looks like quite a small price to save the environment of that vast region.

The present century gave the world so notable a document as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Still, we have witnessed the most brutal and massive violations of those rights. Famine, genocide, ethnic cleansing, torture and various forms of discrimination continue to haunt mankind. That is why the strengthening of international mechanisms to monitor human rights violations is especially urgent today. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights should play a leading role. Cases of the most massive violations of human rights should be considered by the Security Council with a view to taking preventive or coercive measures.

Hence, it is imperative to strengthen the role of international law in international relations in order to ensure strict observance of the main norms and principles, first and foremost respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity and the peaceful settlement of disputes. Ukraine continues to support the International Court of Justice as the Organization's principal legal institution.

The establishment of a world system that would guarantee peace and security, prosperity and sustainable economic development, and the preservation of the environment for future generations requires decisive joint action by the international community. That process should be led by a reformed and renewed United Nations, an organization with great experience and opportunities to solve problems of global dimensions. For that purpose, the General Assembly has approved a comprehensive programme for United Nations reform —

by the way, under the presidency of my predecessor Hennadiy Y. Udovenko, who is present in this Hall today. But while debating it, we did not notice that two years had passed and that we were approaching the brink of the millennium. The prominent Ukrainian philosopher of the eighteenth century, Grigory Skovoroda, said that a waste of time is the heaviest of all losses. Let us bring to life what we have conceived for the benefit of the United Nations.

The President: I call next on His Excellency Mr. Mohamed Benaissa, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Cooperation of Morocco.

Mr. Benaissa (Morocco) (*spoke in Arabic*): It gives me great pleasure to congratulate you, Mr. President, and the sisterly country of Namibia on your election to chair the proceedings of the fifty-fourth session of the General Assembly. This choice is truly an honour for our continent and a tribute to your promising country. We are convinced that under your leadership our work this year will be successful, and this session will constructively result in the realization of our expectations.

I would also like to express appreciation and gratitude to your predecessor, Mr. Didier Opertti, Foreign Minister of the friendly country of Uruguay, for his excellent conduct of the work of the previous session.

We also welcome the new Member States that have joined our Organization: the Republic of Kiribati, the Republic of Nauru and the Kingdom of Tonga.

I should also like to take this opportunity to thank the Secretary-General of our Organization, Mr. Kofi Annan, for his admirable management of the Organization and for his commendable efforts to infuse it with a new dynamism so that its organs can fulfil our aspirations. He deserves our admiration and appreciation.

Many important events have marked this century to which we are about to bid farewell. They have led to a new political and economic balance of power and a modification of the international system. With the disintegration of borders, the evolution of means of communication and the spread of globalization in the financial and technological fields, the universality of the issues affecting mankind has become the most distinctive characteristic of international relations, and the problems of the age have become too difficult for individual countries to resolve.

The tragedies witnessed over the last few years, including ethnic cleansing and blatant defiance of the universal human conscience, call more than ever before for pooling the efforts of the international community and consolidating the role and the efficiency of the United Nations, which is indeed the best-suited forum for settling international disputes. This would make it possible for the Organization to fully shoulder its responsibilities and keep abreast of current challenges, while displaying a political will that would enhance its credibility and strengthen its ability to achieve its goals.

As regards the Security Council, current events on the international scene require that we reconsider its working methods and its composition in order to enhance its credibility, promote its ability to preserve international peace and security and ensure balanced representation in its membership on the basis of equitable geographical distribution.

Economic and social conditions in the world still rank high among the concerns of mankind. Indeed, as illustrated by widely divergent indicators between the North and the South, the world is suffering from a widening gap in economic and social conditions and strong disparities in human development. Those ever-increasing disparities constitute a basic factor in the instability that characterizes our world today. This imbalance has led to a proliferation of poverty in various parts of the world, as well as to the spread of illiteracy, unemployment and several other social ills that now threaten world peace and security.

We recall with appreciation the distinguished role played by the United Nations, as it has developed over the last few years a special interest in various economic and social development issues.

Morocco is fully aware of the importance of social development as a fundamental means of achieving comprehensive development. This awareness was the cornerstone of several pioneering initiatives taken by Morocco to overcome social problems, especially the plague of poverty. To that end, an institution known as the Mohammed V Solidarity Foundation was set up, and is now under the supervision of His Majesty King Mohammed, to fight poverty by mobilizing the active components of civil society.

In keeping with its firm belief that individual and collective prosperity cannot take place outside the purview of democracy and respect for human rights,

Morocco has taken keen interest in the consolidation of human rights and democratic practices. Hence, Morocco has undertaken some pioneering initiatives in the area of promoting human rights, disseminating a human rights culture, and protecting them against any violation or transgression. It has enhanced the role of the various components of civil society, including institutions that promote the role of women, in various political, economic, social and cultural fields. Opting for the multiparty system and democratic alternation of government as a political system, Morocco has made human rights and fundamental freedoms an individual and a collective principle that is considered a strong pillar of the Moroccan political system. This, in turn, has made it possible for Morocco to hold a distinguished position among the countries that have adopted democracy as a system and as a way of life.

Convinced of the absolute necessity of coexistence with its neighbours, in keeping with the strong historical ties between Morocco and Spain, and given the desire of both countries to further enhance their cooperation and good neighbourliness, Morocco has been calling for the implementation of the initiative of the late King Hassan II aimed at setting up a joint Moroccan-Spanish working group to reach a final settlement of the current status of the two cities, Ceuta and Melilla, and the neighbouring islands, in a way that ensures Morocco's sovereignty over those regions while guaranteeing Spain's economic interests. We do hope that the deep historical ties between the two countries, the solid and privileged relations that exist between them, and the ambitions of both peoples to achieve further rapprochement and cooperation, will be a strong incentive towards reaching a final solution to this problem, satisfactory to both parties.

Ever since their independence, Arab Maghreb countries have believed in the inevitable necessity to achieve regional integration in order to counter the challenges of development and to ensure the progress and prosperity of their peoples. In keeping with those objectives, the Arab Maghreb Union was set up as a reflection of the region's age-old shared history and an embodiment of its peoples' unity of faith, language, history and common destiny. Given the blocs and groupings that characterize the world today and the challenges imposed by the current economic situation, we believe that it is necessary to pursue efforts to give fresh impetus to the Arab Maghreb Union as well as a new dynamism to its various organs, while strengthening cooperation among its members so that it may discharge its mission by taking up development challenges and building an integrated Maghreb economy.

Morocco welcomes with deep satisfaction the positive developments witnessed on the Lockerbie issue, which have led to the suspension of the sanctions imposed on the sisterly Libyan Arab Jamahiriya. Because of its solidarity with that country, a founding member of the Arab Maghreb Union and one of the pioneering leaders among Arab and African countries, Morocco notes with deep regret the long lasting hardships and the grave tragedy endured by the Libyan people due to the embargo imposed on them. We hope that sanctions applied to the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya will be completely and definitively lifted as soon as possible, on the basis of the principles of justice and equity, and that the sisterly Libyan Arab Jamahiriya will resume its constructive role, within the international community, for the establishment of security, stability and peace.

The international community has followed with satisfaction the beginning of a comprehensive settlement of the Middle East crisis. This has been achieved through various agreements reached by the parties concerned, the latest being the Sharm el-Sheikh Memorandum. Those accords rekindled the hopes of the peoples of the region in building a new future based on security, stability and coexistence. The agreements that have been signed — which are founded on the principle of land for peace — set the stage for a new era based on international law, as attested to by the commitments made by the parties concerned. The accords uphold the right of all peoples of the region to live in security and stability, and the right of the Palestinian people in particular to exercise self-determination and to establish its independent State.

The brotherly Iraqi people have been suffering for years from the impact of an economic embargo that has had pernicious effects on them, especially children, women and the elderly. As it voices full solidarity with the fraternal Iraqi people, Morocco calls for the pooling of international efforts in order to lift the embargo and to find a peaceful settlement to this problem within the framework of international law and in compliance with Security Council resolutions. In this respect, we stress the need to preserve the sovereignty of Iraq, its security and its territorial integrity.

Solving the many problems affecting Africa requires that the international community seriously tackle the economic and social conditions and the various conflicts that beset most African countries, conditions that have had a negative effect on the hopes of African peoples, as well as on their legitimate right to achieve comprehensive development and to live under stable and safe conditions.

Being deeply committed to our ties of brotherhood and solidarity with all African countries, Morocco has consistently placed African issues at the forefront of its concerns. As a token of its unwavering solidarity with African countries, Morocco devotes 95 per cent of its annual international assistance appropriations to African countries.

Morocco has followed with keen interest the international endeavours aimed at restoring peace in Kosovo and at putting an end to the bloody conflict and ethnic-cleansing campaigns that have claimed the lives of thousands of innocents Kosovars, in blatant violation of international law and of the most fundamental principles of human rights. Given its keen desire to strengthen peace in the region, Morocco has expressed its readiness to participate in KFOR and has made all possible humanitarian efforts to provide material assistance to Kosovar refugees. To this end, it also set up, at the initiative of Her Royal Highness Princess Lalla Meryem, a fund to collect donations for Kosovar children.

Because of its geographical location, its historical ties and its economic and cultural relations with Mediterranean countries, Morocco believes that the consolidation of security and stability and the promotion of cooperation in the region are an absolute necessity. Thus Morocco took part in the Euro-Mediterranean dialogue, from the Barcelona conference to the Stuttgart conference, which provided an opportunity to assess the Barcelona process three years after its inception. During the Stuttgart conference Morocco voiced its conviction that for security and stability to prevail in the Mediterranean basin there has to be an effective partnership between the countries of the region that takes into consideration the political, economic, social and cultural dimensions.

The Kingdom of Morocco has always taken a great interest in the question of disarmament, because it is linked both to international peace and security and to economic and social development. In this respect, we reiterate the need to ensure that all the countries of the Middle East region join the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons and submit their facilities to the safeguards system of the International Atomic Energy Agency. This action, along with making the Middle East region a nuclear-weapons-free zone, would be a decisive contribution to restoring confidence and peace in that region.

As regards the question of the referendum in our southern desert provinces, Morocco reiterates its full support for the efforts of the United Nations, especially those of the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, aimed at completing the process as soon as possible and under conditions most conducive to transparency, justice and success. As a contribution towards that objective, Morocco has endeavoured, from the start of the process, to inform the United Nations of any deviations that might affect the legitimate rights of the potential participants in the referendum. Thus, following the publication of the first part of the preliminary lists of the Sahraouis that have been identified, Morocco expressed concern over practices that have affected the identification process and have led to the elimination of thousands of names of people of Sahraoui origin, despite the fact that they had met the agreed criteria and conditions.

It is our dearest hope that the United Nations will come up with equitable solutions that take into consideration our concerns and those of thousands of Sahraoui candidates who, had they not been compelled to leave the region because of the fight they were waging against colonialism, would have been covered by the census and therefore been accepted directly by the Identification Commission.

The phenomenon of economic globalization has been swiftly developing and expanding. It has led to a liberalization of markets, swifter exchange relations, enhanced global productivity and greater financial flows. The economic changes affecting the international arena call for a comprehensive review of the rules of international economic interactions in order to adapt them to those changes and to the development needs of all of humanity. This aspect was at the forefront of the concerns of His Majesty King Mohammed VI in the address he delivered, when he was Crown Prince, on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the multilateral trading system, celebrated in Geneva in 1998. His Majesty pointed out that

> "the comprehensive project advocated by the founders of our system remains fragile because of the fate of hundreds of millions of people who will not accept indefinite marginalization while tremendous progress and prosperity are being enjoyed by the advanced countries of the world."

In future negotiations, and within the framework of the World Trade Organization, Morocco is of the view that the adoption of a global and balanced approach reflecting the legitimate interests of all countries, while taking into account the developmental dimension of

advanced countries, should be the best means to achieve a just and balanced international trade system. Morocco believes that effective solutions to the debt problem should not be restricted to partial alleviation of the debt burden of some countries only, but should, rather, take the form of a comprehensive policy to stimulate the economic activity of debt-ridden developing countries through promoting their exports and encouraging direct foreign investments in them.

Following the ninth ministerial meeting of the Group of 77 and China — which I had the honour of chairing and which was held in Marrakesh, Morocco, from 13 to 16 September 1999, in preparation for the tenth session of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development — the Group of 77 and China adopted the Marrakesh Declaration, which pointed out that

> "the disparities in the scope and impact of globalization have led to economic disharmony, both at the international and national levels. This translates into new challenges to our development ambitions. Many developing countries are facing difficulties in their attempts to effectively integrate with the world economy and are suffering the consequences of globalization."

In conclusion, we believe that, as we stand on the threshold of the new millennium, the international community should exert greater efforts to create a political, economic and social environment conducive to further cooperation and rapprochement among peoples, so that all of mankind can enjoy the fruits of peace and live in prosperity and tranquility.

The President: The next speaker is the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Uzbekistan, His Excellency Mr. Abdulaziz Kamilov, to whom I give the floor.

Mr. Kamilov (Uzbekistan) (*spoke in Russian*): In my statement, I should like to dwell on those questions, which, in our opinion, demand special attention. First among these is the issue of security and the maintenance of regional and global stability.

Today, we are forced to recognize that terrorism is one of the principal challenges and threats to international security and stability in the twentieth century. Should the United Nations react to this most daunting challenge? Yes. The coordination of the efforts of the international community in the search for legal mechanisms to fight terrorism at the global level has become urgent. The struggle against terrorism transcends the problems of one country or even groups of countries. I take this opportunity to emphasize in particular the serious threat of terrorism facing the States of Central Asia. In this respect, I wish to say the following.

First, terrorists, using Islam — one of the world's most peaceful religions, founded on the greatest cultures of civilization — as a cover, are seeking to attain the broadest of political goals: the creation of a new regional and ultimately global order. The terrorists' methods of assassinating peaceful civilians and creating diversions radically contradict the principles and values of Islam.

Secondly, terrorism is undergoing an intensive process of internationalization. Extremists working in Central Asia are consolidating their ranks with recruits from throughout the world. Terrorism has neither nationality, borders nor any particular belief. Attempts to give terrorism, and international terrorism in particular, a national or ethnic character do not reflect reality and have their own dangerous consequences.

Thirdly, the fight against terrorism requires coordinated international efforts and wide recognition of the legitimate rights of States to protect their citizens from terrorist assaults. Terrorists casually and most insolently attack peaceful populations and deprive human beings of their fundamental right to life.

Fourthly, the global danger of terrorism is obvious today. There is an understanding at the international level of the need for coordinated action. At the same time, we do not fully understand the rather subdued reaction of the international community and the major States to the most dangerous spread of terrorism in Central Asia, posing the threat of regional and global destabilization.

Finally, the contemporary wellsprings of terrorism, where it is born and nurtured, are the theatres of military conflict. In our region, that means Afghanistan.

Mr. Ingólfsson (Iceland), Vice-President, took the Chair.

A working meeting of the "six plus two" group in the special format, with the participation of representatives of the two main parties to the Afghan conflict, was held in Tashkent two month ago. The discussion resulted in the signing of the Tashkent Declaration, defining the fundamental principles for the peaceful settlement of the conflict in Afghanistan.

Uzbekistan supports increased international efforts to further assist the stabilization of the situation in Tajikistan and the rapid elimination of new hotbeds of tension in southern Kyrgyzstan, which has become a new target for invasion by international terrorists and extremist forces. In this regard, I would propose the adoption of a resolution by the General Assembly to consider the problem of terrorism in the framework of the Security Council, as well as the establishment of an informal group to coordinate efforts aimed at fighting terrorism and extremist crimes. We also support the proposal to convene an international conference on the fight against terrorism. We believe that the international community, in preparing for the Millennium Assembly in the year 2000, should show its determination by defining extremist crimes and drafting its explicit understanding of the threat of terrorism.

The Republic of Uzbekistan is recognized around the world as an authoritative supporter of the non-proliferation of the nuclear weapons. Uzbekistan is party to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) and the Convention on Physical Protection of Nuclear Material. The Republic was among first countries to sign an Additional Protocol to its agreement with the International Atomic Energy Agency on the application of safeguards in connection with the NPT. These actions revealed not only a deep understanding of the importance of these international documents, but also our desire to make a real contribution to solving the problem of the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons, improving the planet's ecology and strengthening global security and regional stability.

The issue of establishing nuclear-weapon-free zones is firmly established on the disarmament agenda. It is already widely recognized that the creation of such zones is a unique instrument in the process of nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament, which undoubtedly strengthens international and regional peace and security. Let me express the conviction that this topic will be considered as one of the major issues in the work of the 2000 NPT Review Conference. The value of this step is of special importance in the light of nuclear testing in South Asia and the clear tendency towards a global arms race.

Substantial progress has been achieved towards the realization of the Central Asian initiative to establish a nuclear-weapon-free zone. The Central Asian countries, through their common efforts and with the support of the United Nations, have come considerably closer to concluding a treaty on the establishment of a Central Asian nuclear-weapon-free zone. I hope that, at the meeting to prepare the draft treaty to be held in Japan in few days, the experts of the Central Asian countries will be able to finalize the draft.

The Republic of Uzbekistan supports the measures proposed by Secretary-General Kofi Annan to reform the United Nations. The implementation of the reform programme will go a long way towards adapting the United Nations to the demands of the modern world. The Secretary-General's proposal to convene the Millennium Assembly and the Millennium Summit in the year 2000 must be implemented. The year 2000 is a unique symbolic moment to affirm the position of the United Nations and to strengthen its role as a leading force in the twenty-first century.

The Republic of Uzbekistan continues to consider Security Council reform to be a necessary and urgent process. Any delay in this process will prevent the United Nations from adapting efficiently to the dynamics of the coming millennium. We are convinced that Germany and Japan can rightly claim permanent membership of the Security Council. We are also in favour of an increase in the number of new non-permanent members of the Security Council.

The deteriorating problem of the Aral Sea requires me once again to call on the Assembly for support. With the help of international organizations, the opinion that the Aral Sea crisis can be resolved only through humanitarian intervention has gradually taken root in the perception of the international community. But this is not the case.

Measures of this kind have not given positive results on any continent where mankind has been faced with ecological catastrophes. In this connection, it is necessary to develop and implement, with the assistance of the United Nations specialized agencies and donors, a specific, long-term strategy and programme of revitalization for the Aral area, that would affirm the principles of sustainable development, prevent a deterioration of quality of life for people living in the region and ensure a dignified standard of living for future generations.

We are hoping for the effective support of such international financial and economic institutions as the World Bank, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and others, as well as donor countries, in the normalization of the ecological situation and in meeting the pressing needs of the population living

in the affected area. The problem of Aral Sea can be solved only with the help of an adjusted financing mechanism and the conscientious work of experts.

The Republic of Uzbekistan comprehensively supports efforts of the United Nations and the international community aimed at counteracting the illegal cultivation, transportation and consumption of narcotic substances. The problem of drugs should be considered a danger in that it gives rise to terrorism, international crime and money-laundering.

The illegal sale of drugs is the most profitable shady activity in the modern world. The transnational structures controlling global trade in drugs appear in most cases to be more mobile than the structures opposing them. Today, as has been pointed out by previous speakers, more than 90 per cent of the drugs in some European countries are of Afghan origin.

According to a 1998 annual report on international drug control, starting in 1995 Uzbek customs employees halted the attempted illegal export from Europe to Afghanistan of 72 tons of raw chemical material used for heroin manufacturing. This reaffirms the conclusion about the internationalization of the narcotic business and the emergence of international terrorism, which is no less dangerous.

During the twentieth special session of the General Assembly, devoted to the fight against the illegal manufacturing, sale, purchase, transport, trafficking and spread of narcotic substances, we advanced many concrete proposals, including the establishment of a regional coordination centre to fight drug-trafficking and the drug business. Concrete forms of cooperation between Central Asian countries and the European Union were defined.

We call for more work by the United Nations International Drug Control Programme (UNDCP) in the region of Central Asia. The conclusions of experts show that the Central Asian region is considered by the criminal world an important transit area for the transport of drugs to Europe and North America.

Specific UNDCP projects aimed at the development of technical possibilities to control the transit of goods by providing border services with up-to-date methods of drug detection could contribute to this fight, which can hardly be regarded as the problem of one region alone. In this regard, we welcome the establishment, on the initiative of the Secretary-General, of the United Nations Office on Drug Control and Crime Prevention's regional office operating in Uzbekistan.

The process of democratization is long and complicated, especially if it runs parallel to large, extensive economic reforms. However, the real threat to democracy, security and stability in the region stems from the sphere of transnational crime. In this respect, we state our firm support for the work of the Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice.

For this reason, the Republic of Uzbekistan has expressed its intention to present its candidature for membership of the United Nations Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice for the period of 2001-2004. We hope that the tenth United Nations Congress on the Prevention of Crime and Treatment of Offenders, to be held from 10 to 17 April 2000, in Vienna, will be devoted to the search for answers to the challenges of the twenty-first century, as indicated in a number of its main topics.

We would like to focus on the work of UNDP in Uzbekistan. As the largest United Nations programme rendering assistance to developing countries in their process of development, UNDP, together with the Government of Uzbekistan, is carrying out a number of useful projects. We hope that such cooperation will be continued in the future as well.

Nevertheless, I would like to say a few words about one problem that has emerged in our cooperation with UNDP and that, in our view, must be explained. The proposed regional UNDP Programme for development of the Fergana Valley has not received the support of our Government. In our opinion, the substance of the project has not been sufficiently considered and could entail negative consequences.

Despite the exhaustive and comprehensive substantiation by our Government of the unacceptability of this project, which interferes with the security of the region, attempts to involve our country in the participation of the programme by distributing erroneous information throughout the international community have been undertaken during the last three years by UNDP and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe.

We sincerely hope that the new UNDP Administrator, Mr. Brown, will take note of Uzbekistan's assessments. At the same time, we note with satisfaction

the new style of work at the UNDP mission in Uzbekistan, which was recently headed by Mr. Kral.

In conclusion, I wish to refer to the book written by the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, His Excellency Mr. Islam A. Karimov, *Uzbekistan at the Threshold of the Twenty-first Century: Threats to Security, Conditions and Guarantees of Progress*, which says,

> "As we enter the new millennium, we extend to everyone the hand of friendship and mutual understanding, symbolizing this with the words security, stability and sustainability of growth and development. For we believe that the realities these words signify constitute the most solid foundation for global geopolitical balance, and for the peace, prosperity and well-being of every individual country, which will enable every human being to face the future with confidence".

The Acting President: I call on the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Sweden, Her Excellency Ms. Anna Lindh.

Ms. Lindh (Sweden): The past year has been a difficult one for the United Nations. Its principles have been challenged. Its relevance has been questioned. Still, at the end of the millennium, we have proved ourselves unable to prevent war between Ethiopia and Eritrea and unable to prevent genocide in Rwanda or ethnic cleansing in Kosovo. Still, we see flagrant disrespect for international law, humanitarian law and human rights. Children are used as soldiers in Sierra Leone, women are denied all rights in Afghanistan, fundamentalist forces have demonstrating students arrested and possibly sentenced to death in Iran. Other tragic examples can be found in almost all parts of the world.

We can change all that, if only there is political will. It is up to us, the Member States, to ensure that the United Nations and the Security Council are able to uphold international law and their responsibility for international peace and security.

I would like to highlight four key areas that we, the United Nations and its Member States, need to address to make the United Nations truly relevant: the questions of intervention; early action and prevention; nuclear disarmament; and human rights. To succeed, the United Nations system also needs to be reformed, and I will come back to that.

When it comes to intervention to secure peace, regional organizations and arrangements, as well as so-called coalitions of the willing, can have important roles, together with the United Nations, as we have just seen in East Timor. But it is for the Security Council to provide the legal foundation — the mandate — for such action, in particular when force has to be used. Without such a legal foundation, we run the risk of anarchy in international relations, and in fact we undermine the prospects for peace and security; and that long-term perspective must never be lost.

Our responsibility for international peace and security implies that necessary action by the Security Council should not be hindered by a veto. If the Security Council in an urgent situation is paralysed by a veto or a threat of veto, this may undermine the authority and the relevance of the United Nations itself. It also presents the international community with a difficult dilemma.

When human life is threatened on a massive scale, it is not possible to remain passive. Humanitarian intervention has to be assessed on a case-by-case basis, in view of the values at stake and whether all other means have been exhausted. The effects on international law and international security at large have to be considered as well.

As the Secretary-General said yesterday, we must ensure that the Security Council is able to rise to the challenge. It must negotiate in earnest, with creativity and without the threat of veto, to define threats to peace and security at an early stage, and to deal with a crisis before an emergency situation arises. Council action does not necessarily mean the use of force. The use of force almost inevitably causes suffering for the innocent. It should, therefore, only be the last resort. There are many other tools available. The United Nations Charter offers several options.

The most obvious alternative to the use of force is conflict prevention and early action. Member States, in particular the permanent members of the Security Council, must share information on conflict situations and early warning signals with the Secretariat. The Secretary-General should be invited to react to such reports and to propose appropriate and timely action to the Security Council. The United Nations offices in the field and early fact-finding missions dispatched to areas of potential conflict could help the Secretary-General formulate such proposals. Academic institutions and non-governmental organizations could also be helpful in this regard.

The Swedish Government has adopted a programme of action to facilitate and contribute to the prevention of armed conflict. It is our hope that this action plan will stimulate a debate on how to change the focus from crisis management to early preventive action in order to promote a culture of prevention.

When considering peacekeeping operations, the Security Council should not be hampered by short-term budgetary considerations. This sends a very negative message and runs counter to the need for early and preventive action. All countries must pay their assessed contributions in full, on time and without conditions. Naturally, that also goes for the host country. The United Nations must be given the necessary resources to be able to act swiftly upon decisions by the Security Council.

The danger of nuclear devastation has not faded. On the contrary, we are faced with new threats. Last year the positive trend set by Argentina, Brazil and South Africa having joined the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) was reversed by India and Pakistan, which both tested nuclear weapons. Their actions have endangered international peace and security, as well as stability in the region, and are a serious setback to our hopes for a world without nuclear weapons.

Sweden will follow up its call of last year for a new agenda for complete nuclear disarmament. India and Pakistan have taken us further away from that goal. We call upon them, and all other States which have not yet done so, to give up their nuclear ambitions. All countries should become parties to the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) and the NPT.

The five nuclear-weapon States also have a responsibility to complete nuclear disarmament. Deployment of national missile defence systems in the future would create uncertainties and have a negative impact on nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation. We encourage the United States and Russia to re-establish a new momentum in the stalled START negotiations, and especially we call upon Russia to ratify the Start II agreement without further delay. Reductions should be extended to non-strategic nuclear weapons. Furthermore, we urge the three nuclear-weapon States which have not yet done so to ratify the CTBT. All this should be done in an effort aimed at the elimination of all kinds of weapons of mass destruction, which still pose a threat to human beings all over the world.

Any regime violating human rights paves the way for crisis and armed conflict. The defence of human rights is a legitimate concern for the Security Council and the international community. It is our duty to react when the rights of individuals are violated, wherever it happens.

Still, disrespect for democracy and human rights is obvious in many parts of the world. The events in East Timor show how the will of the people can be totally ignored by armed thugs. In Kosovo, innocent civilians are attacked for belonging to a certain ethnic group.

Still, poverty and social injustice deprive people of health and education.

Still, women and girls are facing discrimination. The brutalizing and killing of women is carried out with impunity in many countries. In wars, rape is used as a means of terror. Often women are deprived of their right to earn their own living or participate in the economic and political life of their countries. I urge all countries to adhere to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, without reservation.

Still, 10 years after the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the hopes of children for the future are overshadowed by daily hardship and fear. Too often their talents and skills are buried in poverty or diseases which are curable but not attended to. Too often they are denied proper education, or suffer from discriminatory school systems. The recruitment of child soldiers is a shameful practice that causes individual suffering and will harm the security and development of societies for many years to come. I appeal to all Governments to assist in the conclusion of the two optional protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child in order to prohibit sexual abuse of children and the use of children below the age of 18 in armed conflict.

The use of the death penalty has no place in a civilized society. Sweden welcomes moves taken in a number of countries to put an end to this repugnant practice. The abolition of the death penalty would enhance human dignity worldwide.

Still, the ugly face of racism appears in all parts of the world. Manifestations of racism are an affront to the fundamental principle of non-discrimination and a threat to the fragile fabric of peaceful relations between people in an increasingly global community. The preparations

for the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance provide an important opportunity to identify concrete and action-oriented ways to combat racism. Another important manifestation will be the Stockholm International Forum on the Holocaust, to be held in January 2000.

The early entry into force of the Statute of the International Criminal Court would send a clear signal that the international community is determined to end the culture of impunity for the most heinous crimes under international law. Sweden is committed to early ratification, and we urge all countries to be similarly committed.

As I said at the outset, in order to have an efficient and relevant United Nations, not paralysed by the veto and able to cope with the challenges of conflict prevention, nuclear disarmament and the protection of human rights, we also need reforms. In particular, we need to strengthen the United Nations capacity for conflict prevention and to address root causes of conflict. This is a moral imperative as well as a humanitarian, political and economic necessity.

The Security Council should be enlarged to better reflect the realities of today's international relations. A geographical balance is important in this regard so that the Council can become truly representative of the international community.

The use of the veto, or even the threat of its use, hampers the work of the Council. We support the proposal that as a first step the right of veto should be limited to decisions on enforcement action under Chapter VII of the Charter. We would also like to see the five permanent members agreeing on a moratorium on the use of the veto.

The Security Council should be more transparent and open. This would contribute to the acceptance and legitimacy of its decisions. The Council should be able to hear the views of all relevant parties to a conflict without the implication of political recognition.

The involvement of humanitarian organizations in the Council's deliberations would enhance the quality of its decisions. The humanitarian consequences of Security Council action should always be taken into consideration. This is particularly important when sanctions are imposed.

Sweden welcomes the Secretary-General's efforts to reform the Secretariat and modernize its management culture, and we appreciate the improved efficiency that has followed. Reform is not only about cost-cutting. The aim must be to revitalize the Organization and the multilateral system to cope with the many challenges before us.

Long-term security is closely linked to sustainable development and the eradication of poverty. We need to strengthen not only the United Nations capacity to provide humanitarian assistance but also its long-term social and economic development efforts.

A basic problem is the lack of funds. The donor community needs to ensure sufficient and predictable financial resources to allow the reforms to produce long-term results. Sweden is one of only four countries that meet the United Nations aid target of 0.7 per cent of gross national product. Development requires a true partnership between countries, ensuring sufficient external resources, sound use of internal resources and good governance.

The reform process has to continue, and we look forward to the Millennium Assembly and the summit next year as an opportunity to accelerate the work.

We all have a tendency to blame the United Nations for our own failures and shortcomings. In fact, when the United Nations fails, it is because we fail. If the United Nations loses its relevance, we lose. There is no real alternative to global cooperation to cope with increasingly global problems, and for this, we need the United Nations — but a strengthened and reformed United Nations.

The Acting President: I now call on the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the United Arab Emirates, His Excellency Mr. Rashid Abdullah Al-Noaimi.

Mr. Al-Noaimi (United Arab Emirates) (*spoke in Arabic*): Mr. President, it gives me pleasure to extend to you, on behalf of the delegation of the United Arab Emirates, my congratulations on your election to the presidency of the General Assembly at its fifty-fourth session. I am confident that your experience, diplomatic skills and political ability will contribute effectively and positively to the success of the session's proceedings.

I should also like to express my thanks to your predecessor, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Uruguay, Mr. Didier Opertti, for the prudent manner in which he directed the work of the previous session.

I avail myself of this opportunity to express our gratitude to the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, for his efforts in strengthening the role of the United Nations in the maintenance of international peace and security.

We welcome the admission of the Republic of Kiribati, the Republic of Nauru and the Kingdom of Tonga to membership in the United Nations, which strengthens its universality.

As this session convenes on the eve of the third millennium, the international environment remains plagued by a multitude of problems and challenges, the most salient of which are manifest in the ever-increasing growth of the phenomena of poverty, environmental pollution, armed conflicts, ethnic and religious cleansing, the race to acquire proscribed weapons, organized crime, drugs and international terrorism in its various forms and manifestations.

Dealing with such global problems and phenomena requires that all States adhere to the Charter of the United Nations, respect international law and work on strengthening the mechanisms for cooperation among nations, including the completion of the structural reforms in the United Nations, particularly in the Security Council and the Economic and Social Council.

In this connection, we express our appreciation for the positive role played by the specialized agencies and organizations of the United Nations in providing emergency humanitarian and development assistance to the many peoples affected by the consequences of conflicts and by natural and other disasters.

The course of political events and the wars that raged in the Arab Gulf region in the past two decades, as well as their political, economic and social implications, have more than ever before reinforced the conviction of the members of the Gulf Cooperation Council of the importance of consolidating the bonds of bilateral and multilateral cooperation between the States of the region and the other members of the international community. This must be based on the principles of good neighbourliness, confidence-building measures, peaceful coexistence, non-intervention in the internal affairs of countries, mutual respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of States, renunciation of the threat or use of force and the settlement of existing disputes through dialogue and peaceful means. In addition regional and international cooperation and the strengthening of national capabilities must be reinforced and encouraged, particularly in the fields of social, economic, cultural and human development.

It is this conviction that underlies the position of the members of the Gulf Cooperation Council in providing various forms of humanitarian and development assistance to the many countries of the third world that have been affected by wars, conflicts and natural disasters, the most recent of which was the allocation of $400 million for financing reconstruction and development in the earthquake-stricken areas of Turkey.

The continued occupation by the Islamic Republic of Iran of three United Arab Emirates islands, Greater Tunb, Lesser Tunb and Abu Musa, for almost 29 years stands out in stark contrast not only to the clearly peaceful attitudes adopted by the States of the Gulf Cooperation Council, but also reveals the true intentions of Iran, which persists in violating the territorial integrity of the United Arab Emirates. We had hoped that the Iranian political discourse on this issue would be translated into practical and positive steps in response to the peaceful initiatives of our Head of State, His Highness Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al-Nahyan. Those initiatives, which had met with the support and backing of all friendly and fraternal States, called for either entering into serious bilateral negotiations, with transparent intentions, or accepting the submission of the dispute to the International Court of Justice.

We had also welcomed the establishment of a three-member ministerial committee by the Gulf Cooperation Council to be charged with developing a mechanism for the start of serious negotiations between the United Arab Emirates and the Islamic Republic of Iran. The underlying hope is that a peaceful, just and lasting settlement be reached, one that would bring to an end the Iranian occupation of our three islands.

It is truly regrettable that the consecutive Iranian Governments, rather than dealing with our peaceful initiatives in a spirit of responsibility and political will, have deliberately resorted to a policy of escalation and provocation. They have done so by carrying out naval and aerial military manoeuvres, by establishing civilian and military installations on our occupied islands, and by relentlessly seeking to change their demographic, legal and historical characteristics. The aim is to consolidate the Iranian occupation of these islands and to establish a fait accompli by force.

Such actions represent a direct threat to regional and international security and stability. We consider these Iranian excesses null and void, with no legal validity or basis in the rules of international law or in the Charter of the United Nations or that of the Organization of the Islamic Conference. They are also inconsistent with the documented fact that, historically and legally, these three islands are an integral part of the territorial sovereignty of the United Arab Emirates, regardless of the duration of their occupation.

The security of the Arab Gulf is the collective and joint responsibility of the States of the region. Therefore we stress the importance of promoting a political and diplomatic dialogue as well as cooperation between those States and of channelling their wealth and human and natural resources towards achieving the desired economic and social development for their peoples.

In this context, we call upon the Iraqi Government to complete its implementation of the relevant resolutions of the Security Council, in particular those relating to the fate, whereabouts and release of Kuwaiti nationals and citizens of other countries who are detained or held as prisoners of war by Iraq. This is in addition to the return of Kuwaiti property, documents and archives, an act that would contribute to Iraq's resuming its natural role at the regional and international levels.

The inhumane conditions visited upon the Iraqi people make it incumbent upon all of us to seek an early end to their suffering. We therefore call upon the Security Council, and in particular its permanent members, to reach consensus on the draft projects before it that would lead to the full implementation of all its resolutions and to lifting the international economic sanctions imposed on Iraq while emphasizing the importance of respect for its sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Proceeding from its belief in the need to achieve a just and comprehensive peace in the Middle East based on the principle of land for peace and on the relevant resolutions of the Security Council, the United Arab Emirates welcomes the Sharm el-Sheikh Memorandum and the preliminary contacts between the Palestinian and Israeli sides regarding the final status negotiations, which are to deal with the issues of Jerusalem, settlements, refugees and borders.

We attach great importance to the political developments that will lead to the realization of the objectives and aspirations on which the peace process is based — namely, the achievement of a peaceful, just and lasting settlement of the question of Palestine and of the Middle East problem. We call upon the Israeli Government to implement fully and scrupulously, and without further delay or obstructions, all of the obligations and commitments it has assumed within the framework of these agreements. I refer in particular to those relating to halting settlement activities and policies in various parts of occupied Palestinian land and other occupied Arab territories, including Jerusalem, and to the return of Palestinian refugees in accordance with the relevant resolutions of the international community and the Fourth Geneva Convention.

In applauding the positive role played by the United States of America in reviving the peace process, we express the hope that further efforts will be made by the co-sponsors of the process and by the members of the European Union and other influential States to persuade the Israeli Government to fulfil its historical, political and legal obligations that are based on the principles of international law and the principle of land for peace. This would restore to the Palestinian people their legitimate rights and would enable them to exercise self-determination and establish their own independent state in Palestine, with Jerusalem as its capital.

We also reiterate our full and unqualified support for the position of Lebanon and demand that the Government of Israel implement Security Council resolution 425 (1978). That resolution calls for the Israeli forces to withdraw, without any preconditions, from southern Lebanon and from the West Bekaa Valley, and to resume negotiations on the Syrian and Lebanese tracks at the point where they were cut off. The aim is to ensure a complete Israeli withdrawal from the Syrian Arab Golan Heights to the line of 4 June 1967, in accordance with Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973).

The acquisition and possession of weapons of mass destruction, especially nuclear weapons, are contrary to the objectives and recommendations unanimously adopted by members of the international community at the 1995 Review and Extension Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT). This not only contributes to the escalation of the proscribed arms race and the heightening of tensions, but also disrupts the security balance at the regional and international levels.

Consonant with its position that favours the establishment of nuclear-weapon-free zones throughout the world, the United Arab Emirates emphasizes the importance and necessity of establishing a zone free from weapons of mass destruction, including nuclear weapons, in the region of the Middle East and the Arabian Gulf. It renews its call to the international community to exert greater efforts, demanding that Israel accede to the NPT and place all of its nuclear facilities under the safeguards regime of the International Atomic Energy Agency, in order to ensure peace and security in the region and the attainment of the desired economic and social development.

The member States of the Gulf Cooperation Council followed with keen interest the recent developments in East Timor and the pressures placed on the Republic of Indonesia despite its acceptance of the results of the referendum in that territory. In this connection, we welcome the positive stance of the Indonesian Government, especially its readiness to provide necessary support for the peaceful transfer of authority in that territory, in cooperation with the United Nations. We therefore stress the importance of respecting the territorial integrity of the Republic of Indonesia in order to restore security and stability in that region.

The continuing state of conflict between our two friends, India and Pakistan, over the question of Kashmir, is a source of profound concern to us because it constitutes a direct threat to regional and global security and stability. We therefore invite both Governments to exercise a policy of self-restraint and to resort to dialogue and peaceful negotiations in settling their differences, in accordance with the relevant resolutions of the Security Council, the rules and regulations of international law and the provisions of the recent Lahore accord. We also support all efforts designed to bring about peaceful resolutions of the conflicts in South-East Asia and the Korean peninsula.

The international community recently followed the developments of the deplorable events to which the people of Kosovo, particularly the Muslims, were subjected. These events included ethnic and religious cleansing, population displacements and other heinous crimes by Yugoslav and Serbian forces, in blatant violation of international humanitarian law.

The United Arab Emirates, acting on high-level instructions from an informed leadership, was one of the first countries to participate in the international relief operation. Our armed forces, together with the Red Crescent Society and other humanitarian organizations, provided humanitarian, medical, food and development assistance to the people of Kosovo. In addition, military troops from the Emirates participated in the United Nations peacekeeping operation in Kosovo, helping to ensure the return of the refugees to their homes and land, maintain internal security and initiate and develop vital projects such as schools, roads and hospitals. It is essential for international efforts to continue in order to provide the people of Kosovo with security and humanitarian guarantees and enable them to achieve their legitimate aspirations. It is also in the interest of establishing peace and security in the Balkans.

Despite the positive initiatives by the United Nations, particularly the Security Council, and by the Organization of African Unity to contain conflicts, resolve the internal and regional security problems which plague certain States in Africa and promote national reconciliation between the various political factions, conditions there remain, regrettably unstable. We therefore call upon the States concerned to assume their historic and political responsibilities and resolve their problems by peaceful means so as to enable the peoples of Africa to achieve their aspirations for peace and sustainable development.

In this context, we should like to reiterate that the sanctions imposed on Libya must be lifted now that it has implemented the Security Council resolutions in respect of the Lockerbie issue.

Notwithstanding the relatively positive changes in international economic relations, the liberalization of world trade and multilateral cooperation in the fields of development, finance and trade, the economic and social gap between developed and developing countries is still widening. The consequences of the financial crises in the countries of South-East Asia and elsewhere continue to be felt: they have contributed to the decline in economic growth in many States. Dealing with these and other similar dysequilibria will require a comprehensive and objective assessment of financial, investment, customs tariff and trade arrangements with a view to initiating North-South and South-South dialogue to promote mutually beneficial cooperation and coordination.

In this connection, the relevant international and regional development institutions have an important role to play in ensuring the stability of the world economic and financial order, a continued flow of development assistance from developed to developing countries and cancellation of the poorest countries debts. Cooperation

at the bilateral, regional and subregional levels is also a positive step towards stabilizing international economic relations and, if carried out on the basis of complementarity, equality and justice, should enable the developing countries to become effective participants and should ensure regional and international security and stability.

In conclusion, we express the hope that the preparatory meetings for the Millennium Assembly in 2000 will have a positive outcome, leading to the fulfilment of our countries' and peoples' aspirations for peace, security and sustainable development.

The Acting President: The next speaker is the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Spain, His Excellency Mr. Abel Matutes, on whom I now call.

Mr. Matutes (Spain) (*spoke in Spanish*): I sincerely congratulate Mr. Gurirab on his election as President of the General Assembly at this session, the last to be held before the start of the new millennium, and I wish him great success in the performance of his duties. At the same time I wish to thank his predecessor, Mr. Didier Opertti, for the effective way in which he presided over the previous Assembly.

Spain subscribes fully to the statement made by the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Finland on behalf of the States members of the European Union and should like to contribute to this general debate by presenting my delegation's point of view with regard to the complex problems facing the United Nations at this time.

I should also like to welcome the Republic of Kiribati, the Republic of Nauru and the Kingdom of Tonga. Spain offers them its full cooperation in the tasks that await them as new Members of the Organization.

This has, indeed, been a difficult year for the Organization. Serious crises have arisen in different parts of the world and, at times, the role played in them by the United Nations has been questioned. We are all aware of the efforts made by the Secretary-General to enable the Organization fully to play the role for which it was founded in 1945. However, in certain sectors of international public opinion the idea has taken hold that the United Nations has been incapable of assuming its central and proper role in such situations.

Like any human institution, the United Nations has had its successes and its failures. Nevertheless, it has been a key factor in international relations throughout the second half of the twentieth century and it continues to be so on the threshold of the twenty-first. It fulfils an essential function, which will have to be progressively strengthened as the phenomenon of globalization develops. It is indeed a unique instrument for the international relations we are sharing for the twenty-first century.

It is obvious that, while acknowledging the unique value of the United Nations, we must revise some aspects of the way in which it operates. That is why the process of reform undertaken by the Secretary-General is so important. We must continue to make further progress in that direction.

I should like to stress that Spain does not think of the reform of the United Nations as an exercise whose sole and essential objective is to save money. Rather, we consider such reform to be a way of enabling it successfully to meet the challenges of the new century.

A key aspect of this process is the reform of the Security Council. Spain believes that such reform must pursue three basic goals. First, there must be greater transparency in its working methods, with an increase in the number and the quality of the consultations, both between the countries that make up the Council and between those countries and other Member States. Secondly, it should be more efficient, for which purpose it would be advisable to limit the exercise of the right of veto. There are instances in which the exercise of this right, or even the more or less veiled threat to exercise it, has blocked the functioning of the Security Council and prevented the adoption of essential decisions that enjoyed a broad consensus within the international community. To a large extent, that has promoted the image of the United Nations as inefficient and impotent in the eyes of some sectors of public opinion. Thirdly, it should be made more democratic, which would mean adapting the Council's composition to recent developments in the international community. In current circumstances, and given the split between Member States, it seems possible to reach a sufficient consensus only with regard to the idea of increasing the number of non-permanent members. Spain is in favour of increasing the representation on the Security Council of all regional groups.

Delays in the payment of contributions by some States are unjustifiable and endanger the very operation of the Organization at the very time when it is called

upon to carry out increasingly complex tasks. It is not possible to tolerate the current level of non-payment and at the same time require the United Nations to set up the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo, to organize the transition to independence in East Timor, to establish international criminal courts, to deal with the plight of refugees, to send peacekeeping forces to various parts of the world, and to allocate sufficient resources to its numerous development programmes.

I would like my Government's position on this subject to be properly understood. Spain is the eighth-largest contributor to the Organization's regular budget, and as such has a very direct interest in matters such as budgetary discipline and the effective use of resources. Moreover, Spain considers that all matters of concern to Member States on this issue can and must be thoroughly discussed. What is not acceptable, however, is for anyone to make payment conditional on the granting of unilateral demands.

The coming Millennium Assembly will provide a good opportunity to reflect on all these issues, as well as on the role of the United Nations in the twenty-first century. That Assembly, in the preparation of which civil society will participate, must likewise encourage vigorous debate yielding concrete results. That debate must, in my opinion, focus on two main issues: the elimination of poverty and the consequences of globalization.

A policy to eliminate poverty involves, *inter alia*, a strategy of conflict prevention, sustainable development policies, good governance and the regular provision of funds for development financing. All these mean that efforts must be pooled and responsibilities shared by developed and developing States alike.

Globalization is a phenomenon that involves risks, but that also creates opportunities. The risk is that the weakest countries and the most defenceless sectors of the population will be marginalized from its benefits. Clearly, decisive action by Governments is needed, along with international cooperation. Threats to cultural and linguistic plurality likewise require decisive defensive measures.

At the same time, globalization also generates opportunities and benefits: economic growth, better communications and greater access to information, as well as possibilities for bringing different peoples and cultures closer together. It is especially here that the unique value of the United Nations is most striking. In the face of all these new global problems, which go far beyond the capacity of States for individual action, only a multilateral response will suffice, the result of dialogue and international cooperation. The United Nations is the most appropriate forum for this.

With regard to peacekeeping operations, only the United Nations, in the final analysis, has the legitimacy necessary to authorize them. This year Spain has doubled the number of troops that it contributes to these operations; they are currently deployed in United Nations missions in Guatemala, Kosovo, Bosnia and Herzegovina and East Timor. To this should be added the large number of troops that my country has placed at the service of missions authorized by Security Council resolutions, such as the Stabilization Force (SFOR) and KFOR. Spain participated in the United Nations Observer Mission in Angola (MONUA) until its recent termination, and is now cooperating with the project to strengthen African capabilities for peacekeeping operations.

As a reflection of my country's commitment, Spain will in the next few weeks sign a memorandum of understanding on placing a rapidly deployable peacekeeping force at the disposal of the United Nations.

On the eve of the twenty-first century, it is no longer tolerable to mankind's ethical conscience that atrocities and war crimes should go unpunished. But until recently the international community had not channeled these generalized feelings into a course of concrete action. Yet again, it was the United Nations that did this, by convening the Rome Conference at which the Statute of the International Criminal Court was adopted. Spain signed the Statute, and the ratification process is now at an advanced stage. Moreover, Spain has taken initiatives to promote the signing and ratification of the treaty in order that it may enter into force as soon as possible.

The United Nations has made a vital contribution to the universalization of human rights. Having been elected a member of the Commission on Human Rights for a three-year period, Spain will continue to cooperate with the United Nations in the defence of these rights in line with one of the basic tenets of its foreign policy.

Closely related to this issue is the concept of human security. At a previous session of the General Assembly, Spain took the initiative to propose a draft resolution on the safety and security of international humanitarian personnel, which was ultimately adopted as resolution 52/167. The activity of the Special Committee on Children and Armed Conflict is especially important at this time, as is the significant work of the Secretary-

General's Special Representative on this matter, Mr. Olara Otunnu. The recent Security Council resolution 1261 (1999) is a major step forward in the approach to this problem.

Development cooperation is undoubtedly one of the main global issues on the United Nations agenda. The special meeting on development financing planned for 2001 must be properly prepared, and the follow-up of the major conferences must continue.

Spain attaches special importance to the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Debt (HIPC) Initiative, whose scope and depth must be enhanced. In the wake of hurricane Mitch, Spain initiated debt-cancellation programmes for the most harshly affected countries of the Central American region.

My country has made a substantial effort in recent years in respect of its development cooperation programmes. Not many years ago Spain was an aid recipient, while it now stands above the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development average in the percentage of its gross domestic product devoted to development. In 1998, official development assistance funds grew by 14 per cent, placing Spain among the three developed countries which had most increased these funds during the year.

With regard to disarmament, the United Nations and the Conference on Disarmament will continue to prepare for a conference on small arms to be held in 2001, and will attempt to offset recent reversals in the non-proliferation regime. It is essential that the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty should speedily enter into force, and that difficulties in the preparation of the next review conference of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons be overcome.

It is also necessary to conclude negotiations on a verification protocol to the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production and Stockpiling of Bacteriological (Biological) and Toxin Weapons and on Their Destruction, and to address the issue of fissile materials.

There are many other global issues on which the United Nations plays a vital role, such as the fight against terrorism, drugs and organized crime. However, I should like to dwell for a moment on another matter to which my Government attaches great importance: problems of ageing and of older people. Spain wishes to contribute to the debate on an international strategy on older people based on the existing model in my country. Spain has also submitted its candidacy as the venue for the second World Assembly on Ageing, which could be convened in 2002.

Finally, allow me to refer to the problem of decolonization. At the conclusion of this Decade for the Eradication of Colonization, my country continues to endure the presence of a colonial enclave on its territory. Gibraltar was occupied by British troops in 1704, during one of the European wars of succession. The Territory was turned into a military base and the Spanish population was expelled. Until very recently Spanish citizens in Gibraltar suffered grave discrimination in the exercise of their rights.

General Assembly resolution 2353 (XXII) backed the Spanish views on the decolonization of the Territory, recognizing that Gibraltar's colonial situation should be settled not through self-determination, but, rather, through the restoration of Spanish territorial integrity. Unfortunately, its terms have been ignored by the colonial Power. Spain and Great Britain began a process of negotiation on all the issues, including sovereignty, based on the 1984 Brussels Declaration, but no significant progress has been made. Spain has made a proposal to the United Kingdom that takes into account the interests of the inhabitants of the colony and would allow for the recovery of sovereignty over the Territory after a lengthy period, so far without reply. My Government will continue both its dialogue with the United Kingdom and cooperation with the decolonization Committee in following up on this issue.

From the crises the world has lived through this year, we must learn certain lessons. One is without doubt that the political resolution of the crisis in Kosovo has only been possible thanks to the United Nations, which faced an urgent challenge, and on the success or failure of its response depends to a large extent the public image of our Organization.

In the Western Sahara Spain has supported with concrete measures the action of the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO), and also the Secretary-General's settlement plan. It is willing to increase this support if asked to do so by the Organization and if the parties directly involved agree.

The new possibilities in the Middle East after the signing of the Sharm-el Sheikh Memorandum are seen by my country with great hope, and we are firmly committed to continue cooperating with all sides so that the process begun in Madrid continues on track.

Other regions of the world have suffered particularly during this past year. Unfortunately, this is especially true of Africa, and therefore I wish to emphasize my country's support for the integrated approach taken by the Secretary-General in treating the causes of the conflicts and promoting peace on that continent.

Finally, the most recent challenge to the United Nations is the situation in East Timor. Spain welcomed the adoption of Security Council resolution 1264 (1999), and is willing to contribute to the multinational force to guarantee security in the Territory. My country, likewise, has announced a special contribution to the fund established by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees(UNHCR) to deal urgently with the acute humanitarian situation and the refugee problems on the island.

The Organization's undertakings are sometimes visible, at other times hidden, but they are always indispensable. The citizens of our countries must value them so that the United Nations may enjoy the backing that it needs in order to perform its important duties effectively.

On the threshold of the twenty-first century, Spain reiterates yet again its firm commitment to the Organization and its willingness to put its capacity for external action at the service of the purposes and principles enumerated in the Charter.

The Acting President: I shall now call on those representatives who wish to speak in exercise of the right of reply.

May I remind members that statements in the exercise of the right of reply are limited to 10 minutes for the first intervention and to five minutes for the second and should be made by delegations from their seats.

Mr. Flores (Spain) (*spoke in Spanish*): My delegation would like to comment on the references to the Spanish cities of Ceuta and Melilla, and other parts of Spanish territory, made in the speech this afternoon by the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Cooperation of the Kingdom of Morocco, a country with which Spain maintains, and wants to continue to maintain, excellent relations.

I would like to repeat that the places mentioned are an integral part of Spanish territory, whose citizens are represented in the Spanish Parliament on precisely the same footing and under the same conditions as their compatriots.

Mr. Kourosh (Iran): Some claims raised today by the Foreign Minister of the United Arab Emirates against the territorial integrity of my country are unacceptable and baseless. Since our position on this issue is very clear, I need not get into specifics. I would just like to emphasize that my country is fully committed to its international obligations, including those arising from the 1971 Understanding. We have friendly ties with our neighbours in the Persian Gulf, and we stand ready, as in the past, to enter into substantive discussion with United Arab Emirates officials in good faith and with no preconditions in order to solve any possible problem.

Our message to our neighbours, including the United Arab Emirates, is one of friendship, fraternity and cooperation. We continue to make efforts to strengthen confidence and cooperation in the Persian Gulf region. Consolidation of peace and security is a matter of great importance in our region, and in this context my country has so far spared no efforts to further the cause of peace and security in the region.

Mr. Richmond (United Kingdom): I would like to say a few words in response to the remarks by the Foreign Minister of Spain about Gibraltar. The long-standing position of the British Government on this matter is well known to the Government of Spain. I will simply restate it briefly here.

British sovereignty over Gibraltar was clearly established in the Treaty of Utrecht. This legal fact is incontrovertible. Moreover, the British Government stands by the commitment to the people of Gibraltar contained in the preamble to the 1969 Constitution of Gibraltar, which states that the United Kingdom will not enter into arrangements under which the people of Gibraltar would pass under the sovereignty of another State against their freely and democratically expressed wishes.

The British Government believes that issues relating to Gibraltar can be resolved only by direct talks, such as those established under the 1984 Brussels Declaration. In that regard, we attach importance to continuing the dialogue with Spain as a means to overcoming our differences.

Mr. Samhan (United Arab Emirates) (*spoke in Arabic*): The representative of Iran made a statement in response to the Foreign Minister of the United Arab Emirates on the question of his country's occupation of our three islands. This statement has not added to the positions of Iran, which continue to threaten peace and stability in the region. They run contrary to the statement made in this forum by President Khatami on the dialogue of civilizations, which must be based on the principles of the United Nations Charter and on respect for international law, not the occupation of the territories of others.

I would like here to remind the representative of Iran that the chief of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard last week adopted positions that threaten the security of the region, by threatening to use force if the United Arab Emirates were to restore its legitimate rights in the three islands. The Minister of Foreign Affairs of the United Arab Emirates has reiterated our firm position regarding Iran's occupation of our three islands. We will continue our efforts and peaceful endeavours to put an end to this situation. It is our hope that Iran, our neighbour, will respond to our peaceful initiatives — which enjoy the support both of the members of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and of the international community — to ensure the stability, security and safety of our region, and to improve the relations between the members of the GCC and the Islamic Republic of Iran.

The meeting rose at 7.35 p.m.